

**THE EVENING STANDARD
BOOK OF
STRANGE STORIES**

Uniform with this volume

- A CENTURY OF CREEPY
STORIES

- A CENTURY OF HUMOUR
Edited by
P. G. WODEHOUSE

- A CENTURY OF SEA STORIES
Edited by
RAFAEL SABATINI

- A CENTURY OF LOVE STORIES
Edited by
GILBERT FRANKAU

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BOOK
of
STRANGE
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W. W. JACOBS

A Tiger's Skin

A TIGER'S SKIN

THE travelling sign-painter who was repainting the sign of the "Cauliflower" was enjoying a well-earned respite from his labours. On the old table under the shade of the elms mammoth sandwiches and a large slice of cheese waited in an untied handkerchief until such time as his thirst should be satisfied. At the other side of the table the oldest man in Claybury, drawing gently at a long clay pipe, turned a dim and regretful eye up at the old signboard.

"I've drunk my beer under it for pretty near seventy years," he said, with a sigh. "It's a pity it couldn't ha' lasted my time."

The painter, slowly pushing a wedge of sandwich into his mouth, regarded him indulgently.

"It's all through two young gentlemen as was passing through 'ere a month or two ago," continued the old man; "they told Smith, the landlord, they'd been looking all over the place for the 'Cauliflower', and when Smith showed 'em the sign they said they thought it was the 'George the Fourth', and a very good likeness, too."

The painter laughed and took another look at the old sign; then, with the nervousness of the true artist, he took a look at his own. One or two shadows——

He flung his legs over the bench and took up his brushes. In ten minutes the most fervent loyalist would have looked in vain for any resemblance, and with a sigh at the pitfalls which beset the artist he returned to his interrupted meal and hailed the house for more beer.

"There's nobody could mistake your sign for anything but a cauliflower," said the old man; "it looks good enough to eat."

The painter smiled and pushed his mug across the table. He was a tender-hearted man, and once—when painting the sign of the "Sir Wilfrid Lawson"—knew himself what it was to lack beer. He began to discourse on art, and spoke

somewhat disparagingly of the cauliflower as a subject. With a shake of his head he spoke of the possibilities of a spotted cow or a blue lion.

"Talking of lions," said the ancient musingly, "I s'pose as you never 'card tell of the Claybury tiger? It was afore your time in these parts, I expect."

The painter admitted his ignorance, and finding that the allusion had no reference to an inn, pulled out his pipe and prepared to listen.

"It's a while ago now," said the old man slowly, "and the circus the tiger belonged to was going through Claybury to get to Wickham, when, just as they was passing Gill's farm, a steam-engine they 'ad to draw some o' the vans broke down, and they had to stop while the blacksmith mended it. That being so, they put up a *big* tent, and 'ad the circus 'ere.

"I was one o' them as went, and I must say it was worth the money, though Henery Walker was disappointed at the man who put 'is 'ead in the lion's mouth. He said that the man frightened the lion first, before 'e did it.

"It was a great night for Claybury, and for about a week nothing else was talked of. All the children was playing at being lions and tigers and such-like, and young Roberts pretty near broke 'is back trying to see if he could ride horseback standing up.

"It was about two weeks after the circus 'ad gone when a strange thing 'appened: the big tiger broke loose. Bill Chambers brought the news first, 'aving read it in the newspaper while 'e was 'aving his tea. He brought out the paper and showed us, and soon after we 'eard all sorts o' tales of its doings.

"At first we thought the tiger was a long way off, and we was rather amused at it. Frederick Scott laughed 'imself silly a'most up 'ere one night thinking 'ow surprised a man would be if 'e come 'ome one night and found the tiger sitting in his armchair eating the baby. It didn't seem much of a laughing matter to me, and I said so; none of us liked it, and even Sam Jones, as 'ad got twins for the second time, said 'Shame!' But Frederick Scott was a man as would laugh at anything.

"When we 'card that the tiger 'ad been seen within three miles of Claybury things began to look serious, and Peter Gubbins said that something ought to be done, but before we could think of anything to do something 'appened.

"We was sitting up 'ere one evening 'aving a mug o' beer and a pipe—same as I might be now if I'd got any baccy left—and talking about it, when we 'eard a shout and saw a ragged-looking tramp running towards us as 'ard as he could run. Every now and then he'd look over 'is shoulder and give a shout, and then run 'arder than afore.

"'It's the *tiger*!' ses Bill Chambers, and afore you could wink a'most he was inside the house, 'aving first upset Smith and a pot'o' beer in the doorway.

"Before he could get up, Smith 'ad to wait till we was all in. His langwidge was awful for a man as 'ad a licence to lose, and everybody shouting "*Tiger*!" as they trod on 'im didn't ease 'is mind. He was inside a'most as soon as the last man, though, and in a flash he 'ad the door bolted just as the tramp flung 'imself agin it, all out of breath and sobbing 'is hardest to be let in.

"'Open the door,' he ses, banging on it.

"'Go away,' ses Smith.

"'It's the tiger,' screams the tramp; 'open the door.'

"'You go away,' ses Smith, 'you're attracting it to my place; run up the road and draw it off.'

"Just at that moment John Biggs, the blacksmith, came in from the taproom, and as soon as he 'eard wot was the matter 'e took down Smith's gun from behind the bar and said he was going out to look after the wimmen and children.

"'Open the door,' he ses.

"He was trying to get out and the tramp outside was trying to get in, but Smith held on to that door like a Briton. Then John Biggs lost 'is temper, and he ups with the gun—Smith's own gun, mind you—and fetches 'im a bang over the 'ead with it. Smith fell down at once, and afore we could 'elp ourselves the door was open, the tramp was inside, and John Biggs was running up the road, shouting 'is hardest.

"We 'ad the door closed afore you could wink a'most and then, while the tramp lay in a corner 'aving brandy, Mrs. Smith got a bowl of water and a sponge and knelt down bathing 'er husband's 'ead with it.

"'Did you see the tiger?' ses Bill Chambers.

"'See it?' ses the tramp, with a shiver. 'Oh, Lord!'

"He made signs for more brandy, and Henery Walker, wot was acting as landlord, without being asked, gave it to 'im.

"'It chased me for over a mîle,' ses the tramp; 'my 'cart's breaking.'

"He gave a groan and fainted right off. A terrible faint it was, too, and for some time we thought 'e'd never come round agin. First, they poured brandy down 'is throat, then gin, and then beer, and still 'e didn't come round, but lay quiet with 'is eyes closed and a horrible smile on 'is face.

"He come round at last, and with nothing stronger than water, which Mrs. Smith kept pouring into 'is mouth. First thing we noticed was that the smile went, then 'is eyes opened, and suddenly 'e sat up with a shiver and gave such a dreadful scream that we thought at first the tiger was on top of us.

"Then 'e told us 'ow he was sitting washing 'is shirt in a ditch, when he 'eard a snuffling noise, and saw the 'ead of a big tiger sticking through the edge the other side. He left 'is shirt and ran, and 'e said that, fortunately, the tiger stopped to tear the shirt to pieces, else 'is last hour would 'ave arrived.

"When 'e 'ad finished Smith went upstairs and looked out of the bedroom winders, but 'e couldn't see any signs of the tiger, and 'e said no doubt it 'ad gone down to the village to see wot it could pick up, or p'raps it 'ad eaten John Biggs.

"However, that might be, nobody cared to go outside to see, and after it got dark we liked going 'ome less than ever.

"Up to ten o'clock we did very well, and then Smith began to talk about 'is licence. He said it was all rubbish being afraid to go 'ome, and that, at any rate, the tiger couldn't eat more than one of us, and while 'e was doing that there was the chance for the others to get 'ome safe. Two or three of 'em took a dislike to Smith that night and told 'im so.

"The end of it was we all slept in the tap-room that night. It seemed strange at first, but anything was better than going 'ome in the dark, and we all slept till about four next morning, when we woke up and found the tramp 'ad gone and left the front door standing wide open.

"We took a careful lookout, and by-and-by first one started off and then another to see whether their wives and children 'ad been eaten or not. Not a soul 'ad been touched, but the wimmen and children was that scared there was no doing anything with 'em. None o' the children would go to school, and they sat at 'ome all day with the front winder blocked up with a mattress to keep the tiger out.

"Nobody liked to go to work, but it 'ad to be done, and as

Farmer Gill said that tigers went to sleep all day and only came out toward evening we was a bit comforted. Not a soul went up to the 'Cauliflower' that evening for fear of coming 'ome in the dark, but as nothing 'appened that night we began to 'ope as the tiger 'ad travelled further on.

"Bob Pretty laughed at the whole thing and said 'e didn't believe there was a tiger, but nobody minded wot 'e said, Bob Pretty being, as I've often told people, the black sheep o' Claybury, wot with poaching and, wot was worse, 'is artfulness.

"But the very next morning something 'appened that made Bob Pretty look silly and wish 'e 'adn't talked quite so fast; for at five o'clock Frederick Scott going down to feed 'is hins, found as the tiger 'ad been there afore 'im and 'ad eaten no less than seven of 'em. The sides of the hin-'ouse was all broke in, there was a few feathers lying on the ground, and two little chicks smashed and dead beside 'em.

"The way Frederick Scott went on about it you'd 'ardly believe. He said that Government 'ud 'ave to make it up to 'im, and instead of going to work 'e put the two little chicks and the feathers into a pudding basin and walked to Cudford, four miles off, where they 'ad a policeman.

"He saw the policeman, William White by name, standing at the back door of the 'Fox and Hounds' public-house, throwing a 'andful o' corn to the landlord's fowls, and the first thing Mr. White ses was, 'it's off my beat,' he ses.

"'But you might do it in your spare time, Mr. White,' ses Frederick Scott. 'It's very likely that the tiger 'll come back to my hin-'ouse for the rest of 'em, and he'd be very surprised if 'e popped 'is 'ead in and see you there waiting for 'im.'

"'He'd 'ave reason to be,' ses Policeman White, staring at 'im.

"'Think of the praise you'd get,' said Frederick Scott, coaxing like.

"'Look 'ere,' ses Policeman White, 'if you don't take yourself and that pudding basin off pretty quick, you'll come along o' me, d'ye see? You've been drinking and you're in a excited state.'

"He gave Frederick Scott a push and followed 'im along the road, and every time Frederick stopped to ask 'im wot 'e was doing of 'e gave 'im another push to show 'im.

"Frederick Scott told us all about it that evening, and some

of the bravest of us went up to the 'Cauliflower' to talk over wot was to be done, though we took care to get 'ome while it was quite light. That night Peter Gubbins's two pigs went. They were two o' the likeliest pigs I ever seed, and all Peter Gubbins could do was to sit up in bed shivering and listening to their squeals as the tiger dragged 'em off. Pretty near all Claybury was round that sty next morning looking at the broken fence. Some of them looked for the tiger's footmark, but it was dry weather and they couldn't see any. Nobody knew whose turn it would be next, and the most sensible man there, Sam Jones, went straight off 'ome and killed his pig afore 'e went to work.

"Nobody knew what to do ; Farmer Hall said as it was a soldier's job, and 'e drove over to Wickham to tell the police so, but nothing come o' it, and that night at ten minutes to twelve Bill Chambers's pig went. It was one o' the biggest pigs ever raised in Claybury, but the tiger got it off as easy as possible. Bill 'ad the bravery to look out of the winder when 'e 'eard the pig squeal, but there was such a awful snarling noise that 'e daresn't move 'and or foot.

"Dick' Weed's idea was for people with pigs and such-like to keep 'em in the house of a night, but Peter Gubbins and Bill Chambers both pointed out that the tiger could break a back door with one blow of 'is paw, and that if 'e got inside he might take something else instead o' pig. And they said that it was no worse for other people to lose pigs than wot it was for them.

"The odd thing about it was that all this time nobody 'ad ever seen the tiger except the tramp, and people sent their children back to school agin and felt safe going about in the day-time till little Charlie Gubbins came running 'ome crying and saying that 'e'd seen it. Next morning a lot more children see it and was afraid to go to school, and people began to wonder wot 'ud happen when all the pigs and poultry was eaten.

"Then Henery Walker see it. We was sitting inside 'ere with scythes, and pitchforks, and such-like things handy, when we see 'im come in without 'is hat. His eyes were staring and 'is hair was all rumpled. He called for a pot o' ale and drank it nearly off, and then 'e sat gasping and 'olding the mug between 'is legs and shaking 'is 'ead at the floor till everybody 'ad left off talking to look at 'im.

"'Wot's the matter, Henery ?' ses one of 'em.

"'Don't ask me,' ses Henery Walker with a shiver.

"'You don't mean to say as 'ow you've seen the tiger?' ses Bill Chambers.

"Henery Walker didn't answer 'im. He got up and walked back'ards and for'ards, still with that frightened look in his eyes, and once or twice 'e give such a terrible start that 'e frightened us 'arf out of our wits. Then Bill Chambers took and forced 'im into a chair and give 'im two o' gin and patted 'im on the back, and at last Henery Walker got 'is senses back agin and told us 'ow the tiger 'ad chased 'im all round and round the trees in Plashett's Wood until 'e managed to climb up a tree and escape it. He said the tiger 'ad kept 'im there for over an hour, and then suddenly turned round and bolted off up the road to Wickham.

"It was a merciful escape, and everybody said so except Sam Jones, and 'e asked so many questions that at last Henery Walker asked 'im outright if 'e disbelieved 'is word.

"It's all right, Sam,' ses Bob Pretty, as 'ad come in just after Henery Walker. 'I see 'im with the tiger after 'im.'

"'Wot?' ses Henery, staring at him.

"'I see it all, Henery,' ses Bob Pretty, 'and I see your pluck. It was all you could do to make up your mind to run from it. I believe if you'd 'ad a fork in your 'and you'd 'ave made a fight for it.'

"Everybody said 'Bravo!' but Henery Walker didn't seem to like it at all. He sat still, looking at Bob Pretty, and at last 'e ses, 'Where was you?' 'e ses.

"'Up another tree, Henery, where you couldn't see me,' ses Bob Pretty, smiling at 'im.

"Henery Walker, wot was drinking some beer, choked a bit, and then 'e put the mug down and went straight off 'ome without saying a word to anybody. I knew 'e didn't like Bob Pretty, but I couldn't see why 'e should be cross about 'is speaking up for 'im as 'e had done, but Bob said as it was 'is modesty, and 'e thought more of 'im for it.

"After that things got worse than ever; the wimmen and children stayed indoors and kept the doors shut, and the men never knew when they went out to work whether they'd come 'ome again. They used to kiss their children afore they went out of a morning, and their wives too, some of 'em; even men who'd been married for years did. And several more of 'em see the tiger while they was at work, and came running 'ome to tell about it.

"The tiger 'ad been making free with Claybury pigs and such-like for pretty near a week, and nothing 'ad been done to try and catch it, and wot made Claybury men madder than anything else was folks at Wickham saying it was all a mistake, and the tiger 'adn't escaped at all. Even parson, who'd been away for a holiday, said so, and Henery Walker told 'is wife that if she ever set foot inside the church agin 'e'd ask 'is old mother to come and live with 'em.

"It was all very well for parson to talk, but the very night he come back Henery Walker's pig went, and at the same time George Kettle lost five or six ducks.

"He was a quiet man, was George, but when 'is temper was up 'e didn't care for anything. Afore he came to Claybury 'e 'ad been in the Militia, and that evening at the 'Cauliflower' 'e turned up with a gun over 'is shoulder and made a speech, and asked who was game to go with 'im and hunt the tiger. Bill Chambers, who w s still grieving after 'is pig, said 'e would, then another man offered, until at last there was seventeen of 'em. Some of 'em 'ad scythes and some pitchforks, and one or two of 'em guns, and it was one o' the finest sights I ever seed when George Kettle stood 'em in rows of four and marched 'em off.

"They went straight up the road, then across Farmer Gill's fields to get to Plashett's Wood, where they thought the tiger 'ud most likely be, and the nearer they got to the wood the slower they waiked. The sun 'ad just gone down and the wood looked very quiet and dark, but John Biggs, the blacksmith, and George Kettle walked in first, and the others follered, keeping so close together that Sam Jones 'ad a few words over his shoulder with Bill Chambers about the way 'e was carrying 'is pitchfork.

"Every now and then somebody 'ud say, '*Wot's that?*' and they'd all stop and crowd together and think the time 'ad come, but it 'adn't, and then they'd go on agin, trembling, until they'd walked all round the wood without seeing anything but one or two rabbits. John Biggs and George Kettle wanted for to stay there till it was dark, but the others wouldn't 'ear of it for fear of frightening their wives, and just as it was getting dark they all come tramp, tramp, back to the 'Cauliflower' agin.

"Smith stood 'em 'arf a pint apiece, and they was all outside 'ere fancying theirselves a bit tor wot they'd done when we

see old man Parsley coming along on two sticks as fast as 'e could come.

"'Are you brave lads a-looking for the tiger?' he asks.

"'Yes,' ses John Biggs.

"'Then 'urry up, for the sake of mercy,' ses old Mr. Parsley, putting 'is 'and on the table and going off into a fit of coughing; 'it's just gone into Bob Pretty's cottage. I was passing and saw it.'

"George Kettle snatches up 'is gun and shouts out to 'is men to come along. Some of 'em was for 'anging back at first, some because they didn't like the tiger and some because they didn't like Bob Pretty, but John Biggs drove 'em in front of 'im like a flock o' sheep and then they gave a cheer and ran after George Kettle full pelt up the road.

"A few wimmen and children was at their doors as they passed, but they took fright and went indoors screaming. There was a lamp in Bob Pretty's front room, but the door was closed and the 'ouse was silent as the grave.

"George Kettle and the man with the guns went first, and then came the pitchforks, and last of all the scythes. Just as George Kettle put 'is 'and on the door he 'eard something moving inside, and the next moment the door opened and there stood Bob Pretty.

"'What the dickens l' 'e ses, starting back as 'e see the guns and pitchforks pointing at 'im.

"'Ave you killed it, Bob?' ses George Kettle.

"'Killed wot?' ses Bob Pretty. 'Be careful o' them guns. Take your fingers off the triggers.'

"'The tiger's in your 'ouse, Bob,' ses George Kettle, in a whisper. 'Ave you on'y just come in?'

"'Look 'ere,' ses Bob Pretty. 'I don't want any o' your games. You go and play 'em some where else.'

"'It ain't a game,' ses John Biggs; 'the tiger's in your 'ouse and we're going to kill it. Now, then, lads.'

"They all went in in a 'eap, pushing Bob Pretty in front of 'em, till the room was full. Only one man with a scythe got in, and they wouldn't 'ave let 'im in if they'd known. It a'most made 'em forget the tiger for the time.

"George Kettle opened the door wot led into the kitchen, and then 'e sprang back with such a shout that the man with the scythe tried to escape, taking Henery Walker along with 'im. George Kettle tried to speak, but couldn't. All 'e could do

was to point with 'is finger at Bob Pretty's kitchen—and *Bob Pretty's kitchen was for all the world like a pork-butcher's shop.* There was joints o' pork 'anging from the ceiling, two brine tubs as full as they could be, and quite a string of fowls and ducks all ready for market.

"'Wot d'ye mean by coming into my 'ouse?' ses Bob Pretty, blustering. 'If you don't clear out pretty quick, I'll make you.'

"'Nobody answered 'im; they was all examining 'ands o' pork and fowls and such-like.

"'There's the tiger,' ses Henery Walker, pointing at Bob Pretty; that's wot old man Parsley meant.'

"'Somebody go and fetch Policeman White,' ses a voice.

"'I wish they would,' ses Bob Pretty. 'I'll 'ave the law on you all for breaking into my 'ouse like this, see if I don't.'

"'Where'd you get all this pork from?' ses the black-smith.

"'And them ducks and hins?' ses George Kettle.

"'That's my business,' ses Bob Pretty, staring 'em full in the face. 'I just 'ad a excellent opportunity offered me of going into the pork and poultry line and I took it. Now, all them as doesn't want to buy any pork or fowls go out o' my house.'

"'You're a thief, Bob Pretty!' says Henery Walker. 'You stole it all.'

"'Take care wot you're saying, Henery,' ses Bob Pretty, 'else I'll make you prove your words.'

"'You stole my pig,' ses Herbert Smith.

"'Oh, 'ave I?' ses Bob, reaching down a 'and o' pork. 'Is that your pig?' he ses.

"'It's just about the size o' my pore pig,' ses Herbert Smith.

"'Very usual size, I call it,' ses Bob Pretty; 'and them ducks and hins very usual-looking hins and ducks, I call 'em, except that they don't grow 'em so fat in these parts. It's a fine thing when a man's doing a honest business to 'ave these charges brought agin 'im. Dis'eartening, I call it. I don't mind telling you that the tiger got in at my back winder the other night and took 'arf a pound o' sausages, but you don't 'ear me complaining and going about calling other people thieves.'

"'Tiger be hanged,' ses Henery Walker, who was almost

certain that a loin o' pork on the table was off 'is pig ; 'you're the only tiger in these parts.'

" 'Why, Henery,' ses Bob Pretty, 'wot are you a-thinkin' of? Where's your memory? Why, it's on'y two or three days ago you see it and 'ad to get up a tree out of its way.'

"He smiled and shook 'is 'ead at 'im, but Henery Walker on'y kept opening and shutting 'is mouth and at last 'e went outside witout saying a word.

" 'And Sam Jones see it too,' ses Bob Pretty ; 'didn't you, Sam?'

"Sam didn't answer 'im.

" 'And Charlie Hall and Jack Minns and a lot more,' ses Bob ; 'besides, I see it myself. I can believe my own eyes, I s'pose?'

" 'We'll have the law on you,' ses Sam Jones.

" 'As you like,' ses Bob Pretty ; 'but I tell you plain, I've got all the bills for this properly made out, upstairs. And there's pretty near a dozen of you as'll 'ave to go in the box and swear as you saw the tiger. Now, can I sell any of you a bit o' pork afore you go? It's delicious eating, and as soon as you taste it you'll know it wasn't grown in Claybury. Or a pair o' ducks wot 'ave come from two 'undred miles off, and yet look as fresh as if they was on'y killed last night.'

"George Kettle, whose ducks 'ad gone the night afore, went into the front room and walked up and down fighting for 'is breath, but it was all no good ; nobody ever got the better o' Bob Pretty. None of 'em could swear to their property, and even when it became known a month later that Bob Pretty and the tramp knew each other, nothing was done. But nobody ever 'eard any more of the tiger from that day to this."

RALPH STRAUS

The Room on the Fourth Floor

THE ROOM ON THE FOURTH FLOOR

JOHN CHESTER ought never to have gone in for politics. I am quite certain that he should have sat down at a desk and written romances, and become a "best-seller", and built himself a marble house, and married a wife, and hired a press-agent. Instead, as everybody knows, he elected to be returned to Parliament twenty-five years ago, and there he has remained ever since, always upon the fringe of the Government, though never actually entering those extraordinary precincts.

Probably succeeding Premiers have considered that Chester's duties as a raconteur at fashionable dinner-tables must for ever preclude him from undertaking anything else, though, I dare say, he has refused office on his own account. He is just the kind of man to do such a thing—a man too keen about other people to look properly after his own interests.

His appearance, as you know, is military. That white moustache suggests the field-marshal, and his clothes are obviously of the dragoon cut. Also, he has a figure which, to my knowledge has changed not an inch in the last twenty years. Some people call him a phenomenon and expect you to know exactly what they mean, and somehow you do. He knows everyone and goes everywhere. He has more friends than any other man in Europe. And he is the kind of man to whom people, even the discreet people, tell things, which possibly accounts for his amazing stock of stories.

I was dining with him a week or two ago at the House of Commons. A world-famous ex-Minister was sitting in solitary state at the next table. Chester had been unusually silent, and I wondered what was troubling him; but when the great statesman hurried away, my host gave the peculiar chuckle which, with him, is the invariable introduction to some yarn or other.

"The most remarkable man in England," he began, looking in the direction of the now empty table.

"So I am given to understand."

"He is the only man who guessed the Farringham riddle, you know. Guessed it at once, too. Most remarkable man. Yes. And yet. . . ."

He paused and looked at me as though I had contradicted him.

"Sometimes," he continued, twirling the white moustache, "I wonder whether he knew more about the affair than he pretended. He *might* have heard of it, of course, in his official capacity."

"You mean when he was Prime Minister?"

"Precisely."

"You pique my curiosity," said I.

John Chester emptied his glass. "You have never heard of the Farringham case, then? No, well, in the ordinary way you wouldn't. So many of these things have to be hushed up. Besides, it is thirty years old now."

I lit a cigar and prepared for one of Chester's inimitable yarns.

"Yes," he began, "Mrs. Farringham was a beautiful widow with a passion for travelling in unusual places. She had plenty of money, and she moved from one continent to the next as you or I drive to our clubs. She never took a maid with her; but her daughter, I suppose, did much to fill the maid's place. I met them first in Florence. I remember. The girl must have been about twenty then, Mrs. Farringham nearly forty, though she scarcely looked older than her daughter.

"She was entertaining some Italian prince who wanted to become her son-in-law or her husband—I couldn't make up my mind which, and didn't like to ask—and I was invited to call at her London house. I fully intended to go as soon as I returned home, but—well, you shall hear why I never had the opportunity.

"It was in the year of the great Exhibition in Paris—1900. The Farringhams had been travelling in Russia and Turkey. They had spent a week in Constantinople—a detestable place—and had decided to make a tour through Asia Minor. But apparently for no reason at all Mrs. Farringham suddenly took it into her head that she would like to buy new carpets for her

London house, and the Asia Minor trip was indefinitely postponed.

"The ladies visited Thomas Cook, and Thomas Cook in his best English told them how to reach home in the most comfortable manner. Incidentally, he advised a night or two in Paris. The Exhibition had just opened its gates. Now I don't suppose for one moment that Mrs. Farringham cared in the least whether she saw the Exhibition or not, but her daughter had not seen so much of the world as her indefatigable mother, and it was decided that twenty-four hours in Paris would make a pleasant break in a tiresome journey.

"And so it happened that three days later the two ladies, rather tired and rather irritable, arrived at the Paris terminus. It was just eight o'clock in the evening. They had already dined in the train. A porter found their baggage—three large trunks and a green bag which had accompanied Mrs. Farringham from the time she had first crossed the Channel—and, with the help of a cabman, succeeded in placing the four pieces on the roof of the cab. Before driving off, however, the cabman altered the position of the green bag. Apparently he had got it into his head that the green bag was the last straw to break his conveyance, and he put it beneath his feet on the box.

"When they arrived at one of the big hotels—I forgot for the moment which it was—the ladies asked for two adjoining rooms.

"The politiest of hotel managers shrugged his shoulders many times. 'Paris,' said he, 'is full. It flows over with *tout le monde*. It is beyond me to give madame and mam'selle two rooms in the closest adjoinment. But if madame will take an apartment on the fourth floor, and mam'selle an apartment on the fifth floor—of the extreme comfort—it will be well.' His manner implied that only madame's beauty had made such a favour possible.

"The ladies agreed, and signed their names in the visitors' book. One of the hotel porters took charge of the trunks, and a chambermaid showed the visitors to their rooms. Mrs. Farringham's bedroom was not very large, but it looked comfortable. Her daughter's room was exactly above it.

"The porter unstrapped Mrs. Farringham's trunks, and in the politest possible way hoped that the ladies would enjoy their visit to Paris. Then he received a small coin and

disappeared. The chambermaid uttered a similar sentiment and followed his example. Mother and daughter were left alone. You follow so far?"

"Perfectly," said I.

John Chester looked up at the ceiling. "Very well, then. Here you have two estimable ladies arriving one evening in a Paris hotel of unimpeachable respectability and being given rooms one over the other. Good.

"For a short while Miss Farringham stayed with her mother and helped her to unpack a few things. Then, feeling tired, she suggested that they should both go to bed.

"Immediately?" asked her mother. "It is not yet nine o'clock."

"Very well," said the girl, "I will lie down for half an hour or so in my own room and then come down to help you undress."

"And she went to her room on the fifth floor.

"She was feeling particularly drowsy. Nearly two days in a continental train is enough to make anyone drowsy. She just lay down on her bed, dressed as she was, and in a minute or two was asleep."

Again my host paused, this time to refill his glass. "Quite an ordinary story, isn't it?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

I knew better than to utter a word.

"Yes," he went on, "the girl lay on her bed and fell asleep. When she awoke it was ten minutes before midnight. She went down to the fourth floor and knocked on the door of her mother's room. There was no answer. She went in. The room was dark. She turned on the electric light. The bed was empty. Indeed, the room was obviously untenanted. It was awaiting the arrival of some visitor

"Of course she must have made some mistake. She went out into the passage. Her mother's room would be an adjoining one. But on one side of the empty room was a bathroom, and outside the door of the other stood two unmistakably masculine boots. Added to which she was almost certain that she recalled the correct number. She rang for the chambermaid.

"I am afraid I have made some mistake," she said. "I thought this was my mother's room, but—this is the fourth floor, by the way, isn't it?"

"The maid looked at her curiously. 'Yes, mam'selle, this is indeed the fourth floor, but what does mam'selle mean? No lady accompanied mam'selle to the hotel. Mam'selle travelled with herself!'"

John Chester looked at me across the table in much the same way as I imagined the chambermaid had stared at Miss Farringham. It was almost a minute before he spoke again. I had no notion what was coming, but already felt in some vague way that I was no longer sitting in the dining-room of the House of Commons. I leant forward over the table. "Go on, dear man, please!"

"'Mam'selle travelled with herself,'" he repeated. "Yes, that is what the chambermaid said, and Miss Farringham stared at her. 'You are making a very stupid mistake,' she said. 'Why, surely it was you who took in my mother's bag—a large green bag. We came together, about half-past eight.'"

"The maid seemed completely bewildered. 'Shall I ring for the porter?' she asked, more or less mechanically.

"Miss Farringham nodded. A feeling of uneasiness had suddenly come over her.

"The porter came up, and the girl recognized him. She repeated her question. The porter allowed his mouth to open to its widest extent, which happened to be his method of expressing the completest surprise. No madame, said he, had arrived with mam'selle. He had certainly taken mam'selle's two trunks to a room on the fifth floor, but what did she mean?"

"And then, I fancy, a tiny pang must have touched Miss Farringham's heart. Yet, obviously, this could only be an absurd mistake. In another moment she would be laughing with her mother. She looked hard at the two servants standing there in foolish bewilderment. 'Call the manager, please,' she said.

"They brought the manager to her. He was, as always, vaguely apologetic. Mam'selle was not comfortable in her room? Was there anything he could do? She had not supped? Some refreshment in her room?"

"The girl explained. Her mother had been given a room on the fourth floor. Apparently this had been changed. Where was she now? She asked the questions quite calmly, but her

heart was beating at a greater rate than was good for it. On a sudden it seemed to her that something was horribly, immeasurably wrong. You are probably familiar with that feeling yourself.

"The manager's manner changed ever so slightly. His tones were still suave, but a note of incredulity would not be hidden. It was as though he were angry at being summoned to the fourth floor by a possibly mad Englishwoman for no reason at all. 'Mam'selle is joking?' he asked almost coldly.

"It was then that the girl realized how frightened she was. Wherever her mother might be, even though no more than a single wall was separating them, she was at that moment alone in Paris with strangers who were obviously in no mood to believe what she said. 'But my mother and I, we drove from the station. You gave us the rooms yourself. Yes, and you said how sorry you were that we could not have adjoining rooms because the hotel was full. And then—of course, you remember—we wrote our names in the visitors' book.'

"The manager retained his professional politeness. That is the first necessity in a hotel manager. 'I cannot understand mam'selle,' he said quietly. Then he turned to the porter. 'Bring up the visitors' book,' he ordered.

"The visitors' book was produced. You can imagine how eagerly Miss Farringham examined it. Yes, there, four or five names from the bottom of the last page, was her own; but it was sandwiched in between a vicomte and an English baronet. Her mother's name was not there.

"You can picture her dismay.

" 'Perhaps mam'selle is tired, and over-wrought after her journey,' suggested the polite manager. English girls, he knew, were often peculiar, and Miss Farringham was undoubtedly pretty.

" 'But—my mother!' stammered the girl. 'What does it all mean? I don't understand——'

" 'There is a doctor in the hotel if mam'selle——'

"She interrupted him. 'Oh, you think I am ill. But I am not. We must search the hotel. Perhaps my mother has found a friend; or she may be in the drawing-room. I am horribly nervous. You must help me.'

"The manager shrugged his apologetic shoulders.

"They searched the hotel."

John Chester handed me his cigarette-case. "Yes," he repeated, "they searched the hotel."

"And they found——"

"Everyone but the mother. In an hour's time, as you can imagine, Miss Farringham had become frantic. The manager did everything he could. As a final recourse he despatched the porter to look for the cabman who had driven the girl from the station. It was a rather forlorn hope, but the girl seemed eager to see him. She was in that state of mind in which things are no longer ordinary or extraordinary, but merely hopeful or hopeless. Fortunately the cabman was found. He was still on duty, as a matter of fact, at the terminus. And at two o'clock in the morning he was standing, hat in hand, in the foyer of the hotel."

"It was the same cabman?" I asked.

"Miss Farringham recognized him instantly. 'You remember me?' she asked eagerly.

"'But yes, mam'selle. You arrived at eight-ten—alone. I drove you to this hotel. Two trunks.'

"'No, no. My mother was with me. There were three trunks and a large green bag.'

"The cabman looked stupidly at her.

"'And don't you remember, you changed the position of the bag as we drove off. Perhaps you thought that it was unsafe on the roof. You put it beneath your feet on the box. Oh, you must remember, you must remember!'

"The cabman was obviously astonished. 'But there was no green bag,' said he. 'I remember precisely. The young lady, I think, must be American or English, or she would not be travelling with herself.'

"Miss Farringham stared wildly about her and fell down in a faint.

"They got her to bed and promised to send a telegram to England. Early next morning she crossed the Channel, just dazed. And she was met at Charing Cross by friends just as mystified as herself. That night she was seriously ill. Brain fever."

"But the mother?" I asked.

"Nothing more," said John Chester, "was ever heard of the mother."

The division bell was ringing, and my host excused himself. "I must vote," he explained. "I shall be back in ten minutes,

which will give you just sixty times as long as the ex-Prime Minister took to solve the riddle." He nodded, and hurried away.

I tried to exercise those faculties which the detective of fiction finds so useful. Either Mrs. Farringham had arrived at the hotel in Paris, I argued, or she had not. John Chester had stated distinctly that she had arrived, and therefore. . . .

My host had returned. "A pretty problem?" said he. "Confess yourself completely at sea."

"Completel," said I.

"Come along to the terrace, then," and we walked out and stood looking over the Thames. It was not a warm night, and we were coatless.

"I have often wondered," he began at last, "why Mrs. Farringham had that sudden desire to buy carpets for her London house."

I hurriedly sought for a clue in the carpets, but found none.

"Perhaps," he continued, "it was an excuse. Perhaps she shared in common with most of her sex the desire to practice the gentle art of self-deception. It is just possible, that is to say, that Mrs. Farringham gave up the proposed trip through Asia Minor because she was not in her usual health."

He was silent for so long that I drew his attention to the low temperature.

"Then I'll explain," he said with a smile. "It is all quite simple, and depends on one little fact which may or may not have escaped your notice. In France they have a peculiar way of doing things. A logical way, I admit, but sometimes peculiar. Consequently things happen in France, and particularly in Paris, which could not possibly happen anywhere else. The Farringham affair is a case in point. I will tell you exactly what happened, and then you shall come inside to hear the debate.

"Well, then, here, as I said before, you have the fact of two ladies arriving one evening in a Paris hotel. There is no question about that: they both arrived, and Mrs. Farringham was given a room on the fourth floor, the actual room which her daughter found untenanted at midnight. Now I will say at once that there was nothing peculiar about this room; it

was just an ordinary bedroom in a big hotel. What was peculiar was the fact that while Mrs. Farringham had been in the room at half-past eight, she was not there, nor indeed anywhere in the hotel, at midnight. Consequently, at some period between these two hours she went out, or was taken out."

"But the manager and the porter. . . ."

"I see you will not let me tell the story in my own way," smiled John Chester. "I was going to show you how you might have solved the riddle. No matter. You shall have the plain sequence of things at once. A few minutes after Mrs. Farringham had been shown to her room her daughter had gone up to the fifth floor and she was alone. Ten minutes later the bell in the room rang. The chambermaid appeared, and to her dismay found madame lying motionless on the floor. She rang for the porter, and the porter, hardly less frightened than herself, fetched the manager. The manager called for a doctor. Fortunately there was one in the hotel. The doctor appeared and made his examination. Mrs. Farringham was dead."

"Dead!" I repeated.

"Dead," said John Chester. "Now the death of a lady in a large hotel is an unpleasant event at all times, but in this case there was something so peculiarly unpleasant that the doctor, instead of notifying the police, called up one of the Government offices on the telephone, and was lucky enough to find a high official still at his post.

"What followed you may think extraordinary, and extraordinary it certainly must have been. In less than an hour's time there had arrived at the hotel a small army of men. Some seemed to be visitors, others workmen. If you had watched them at all, you might have come to the conclusion that a large quantity of furniture was being removed. As a matter of fact it was. In particular, an ottoman might have been seen being carried downstairs and placed in a furniture van, which drove rapidly away. If you had waited about the fourth floor, you might further have seen new furniture brought into the room which Mrs. Farringham had occupied, and you might have been puzzled at a peculiar odour until the manager, whom you would have met casually on the stairs, informed you that a clumsy servant had upset a case of drugs destined for the Exhibition.

"At the same time, if you had been allowed into the manager's own sanctum downstairs you would have seen three or four gentlemen talking earnestly to a chambermaid and a porter, and, at a later hour, to a cabman who happened to have taken up his stand outside the hotel. The porter and the chambermaid incidentally received large sums of money, and the cabman, similarly enriched, was bidden to await instructions. Also several lessons in the art of acting had been given."

"I am more bewildered than ever."

"And yet," said John Chester, "two words whispered over the telephone had been sufficient to cause all these curious events to take place!"

Once again he paused. "Mrs. Farringham had been travelling in the East. Doesn't that suggest something to you?"

"You mean——" I was beginning; but he interrupted me.

"*Bubonic plague!*"

"But I don't see——"

"At headquarters they were obliged to come to a speedy decision. In the interests of the community, my dear fellow, it was decided—the Government, that is to say, decided—that Mrs. Farringham *had never arrived in Paris*. Further they were not concerned. That was the only vital point."

"But even then——"

"Do you suppose," asked John Chester, "that anybody would have visited Paris if a case of bubonic plague had been reported? Even if there was no more than a rumour that——"

"No, but——"

"It was a case of one against the many. The Government, being Republican, and also patriotic, made its choice for the many. Also, being French, it did not lack the artistic temperament."

"It's ghastly!" I murmured.

"It was Exhibition year," said my host. "But you are quite right," he added; "it is very cold. Let us go in."

I do not remember what question was being debated that evening.

MARGARET IRWIN

The Book

THE BOOK

ON a foggy night in November, Mr. Corbett, having guessed the murderer by the third chapter of his detective story, arose in disappointment from his bed and went downstairs in search of something more satisfactory to send him to sleep.

The fog had crept through the closed and curtained windows of the dining-room and hung thick on the air, in a silence that seemed as heavy and breathless as the fog.

The dining-room bookcase was the only considerable one in the house and held a careless unselected collection to suit all the tastes of the household, together with a few dull and obscure old theological books that had been left over from the sale of a learned uncle's library. Cheap red novels bought on railway stalls by Mrs. Corbett, who thought a journey the only time to read, were thrust in like pert undersized intruders among the respectable nineteenth-century works of culture, chastely bound in dark blue or green, which Mr. Corbett had considered the right thing to buy during his Oxford days; beside these there swaggered the children's large, gaily bound story-books and collections of fairy tales in every colour.

From among this neat new cloth-bound crowd there towered here and there a musty sepulchre of learning, brown with the colour of dust rather than leather, with no trace of gilded letters, however, faded, on its crumbling back to tell what lay inside. A few of these moribund survivors from the Dean's library were inhospitably fastened with rusty clasps; all remained closed, and appeared impenetrable, their blank forbidding backs uplifted above their frivolous surroundings with the air of scorn that belongs to a private and concealed knowledge.

It was an unusual flight of fancy for Mr. Corbett to imagine that the vaporous and fog-ridden air that seemed to hang more thickly about the bookcase was like a dank and poisonous

breath exhaled by one or other of these slowly rotting volumes.

He hurriedly chose a Dickens from the second shelf as appropriate to a London fog, and had returned to the foot of the stairs when he decided that his reading to-night should by contrast be of blue Italian skies and white statues, in beautiful rhythmic sentences. He went back for a Walter Pater.

He found *Marius the Epicurean* tipped sideways across the gap left by his withdrawal of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

It was a very wide gap to have been left by a single volume, for the books on that shelf had been closely wedged together. He put the Dickens back into it and saw that there was still space for a large book. He said to himself, in careful and precise words: "This is nonsense. No one can possibly have gone into the dining-room and removed a book while I was crossing the hall. There must have been a gap before in the second shelf." But another part of his mind kept saying, in a hurried, tumbled torrent: "There was no gap in the second shelf."

He snatched at both the *Marius* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* and went to his room in a haste that was unnecessary and absurd.

To-night, Dickens struck him in a different light. Beneath the author's sentimental pity for the weak and helpless he could discern a revolting pleasure in cruelty and suffering, while the grotesque figures of the people in Cruikshank's illustrations revealed too clearly the hideous distortions of their souls. What had seemed humorous now appeared diabolic, and in disgust at these two old favourites he turned to Walter Pater for the repose and dignity of a classic spirit.

But presently he wondered if this spirit were not in itself of a marble quality, frigid and lifeless, contrary to the purpose of nature. "I have often thought," he said to himself, "that there is something evil in the austere worship of beauty for its own sake." He had never thought so before, but he liked to think that this impulse of fancy was the result of mature consideration, and with this satisfaction he composed himself for sleep.

He woke two or three times in the night, an unusual occurrence, but he was glad of it, for each time he had been dreaming horribly of these blameless Victorian works. Sprightly devils in whiskers and peg-top trousers tortured a lovely maiden and leered in delight at her anguish; the gods and

heroes of classic fable acted deeds whose naked crime and shame Mr. Corbett had never appreciated in Latin and Greek Unseens.

When he had wakened in a cold sweat from the spectacle of the ravished Philomel's torn and bleeding tongue, he decided there was nothing for it but to go down and get another book that would turn his thoughts in some more pleasant direction. But his increasing reluctance to do this found a hundred excuses. The recollection of the gap in the shelf now recurred to him with a sense of unnatural importance; in the troubled dozes that followed, this gap between two books seemed the most hideous deformity, like a gap between the front teeth of some grinning monster.

But in the clear daylight of the morning Mr. Corbett came down to the pleasant dining-room, its sunny windows and smell of coffee and toast, and ate an undiminished breakfast with a mind chiefly occupied in self-congratulation that the wind had blown the fog away in time for his Saturday game of golf. Whistling happily, he was pouring out his final cup of coffee when his hand remained arrested in the act, as his glance, roving across the bookcase, noticed that there was now no gap at all in the second shelf. He asked who had been at the bookcase already, but neither of the girls had, nor Dicky, and Mrs. Corbett was not yet down. The maid never touched the books. They wanted to know what book he missed in it, which made him look foolish, as he could not say.

"I thought there was a gap in the second shelf," he said, "but it doesn't matter."

"There never is a gap in the second shelf," said little Jean brightly. "You can take out lots of books from it, and when you go back the gap's always filled up. I haven't you noticed that? I have."

Nora, the middle one in age, said Jean was always being silly; she had been found crying over the funny pictures in the *Rose and the Ring*, because she said all the people in them had such wicked faces.

Mr. Corbett did not like to think of such fancies for his Jeannie. She retaliated briskly by saying Dicky was just as bad, and he was a big boy. He had kicked a book across the room and said, "Filthy stuff," just like that. Jean was a good mimic; her tone expressed a venom of disgust, and she made the gesture of dropping a book as though the very touch of it

were loathsome. Dicky, who had been making violent signs at her, now told her she was a beastly little sneak, and he would never again take her for rides on the step of his bicycle. Mr. Corbett was disturbed as he gravely asked his son how he had got hold of this book.

"Took it out of that bookcase, of course," said Dick furiously.

It turned out to be the *Boy's Gulliver's Travels* that Granny had given him, and Dicky had at last to explain his rage with the devil who wrote it to show that men were worse than beasts and the human race a wash-out.

Mr. Corbett, with some annoyance, advised his son to take out a nice bright modern boy's adventure story that could not depress anybody. It appeared, however, that Dicky was "off reading just now," and the girls echoed this.

Mr. Corbett soon found that he, too, was "off reading". Every new book seemed to him weak, tasteless, and insipid, while his old and familiar books were depressing or even, in some obscure way, disgusting. Authors must all be filthy-minded; they probably wrote what they dared not express in their lives.

His taste for reading revived as he explored with relish the hidden infirmities of minds that had been valued by fools as great and noble. He saw Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë as two unpleasant examples of spinsterhood: the one as a prying, sub-acid busybody in everyone else's flirtations, the other as a raving, craving maniac seeking self-immolation on the altar of her frustrated passions.

These powers of penetration astonished him. With a mind so acute and original he should have achieved greatness yet he was a mere solicitor and not prosperous at this. If he had but the money he might do something with those ivory shares, but it would be a pure gamble, and he had no luck. His natural envy of his wealthier acquaintances now mingled with a contempt for their stupidity that approached loathing. The digestion of his lunch in the City was ruined by meeting sentimental yet successful dotards, whom he had once regarded as pleasant fellows. The very sight of them spoiled his game of golf, so that he came to prefer reading alone in the dining-room even on sunny afternoons.

He discovered also, and with a slight shock, that Mrs. Corbett had always bored him. Dicky he began actively to

dislike as an impudent blockhead, and the two girls were as insipidly alike as white mice ; it was a relief when he abolished their tiresome habit of coming in to say good-night.

In the now unbroken silence and seclusion of the dining-room he read with feverish haste, as though he were seeking for some clue to knowledge, some secret key to existence which would quicken and inflame it.

He even explored the few decaying remains of his uncle's theological library. One of these books had diagrams and symbols in the margin, which he took to be mathematical formulæ of a kind he did not know. He presently discovered that they were drawn, not printed, and that the book was in manuscript, in a very neat, crabbed black writing that resembled black letter printing. It was, moreover, in Latin, a fact that gave Mr. Corbett a shock of unreasoning disappointment. For while examining the signs on the margin he had been filled with an extraordinary exultation, as though he knew himself to be on the edge of a discovery that should alter his whole life. But he had forgotten his Latin.

With a secret and guilty air, which would have looked absurd to anyone who knew his harmless purpose, he stole to the schoolroom for Dicky's Latin dictionary and grammar, and hurried back to the dining-room, where he tried to discover what the book was about with an anxious industry that surprised himself. There was no name to it, nor of the author. Several blank pages had been left at the end, and, the writing ended at the bottom of a page, with no flourish nor superscription, as though the book had been left unfinished. From what sentences he could translate it seemed to be a work on theology.

There were constant references to the Master, to his wishes and injunctions, which appeared to be of a complicated kind. Mr. Corbett began by skipping these as mere accounts of ceremonial, but a word caught his eye as one unlikely to occur in such an account. He read this passage attentively, looking up each word in the dictionary, and could hardly believe the result of his translation.

"Clearly," he decided, "this book must be by some early missionary, and the passage I have just read the account of some horrible rite practised by a savage tribe of devil-worshippers." Though he called it "horrible," he reflected on it, committing each detail to memory. He then amused

himself by copying the signs in the margin near it and trying to discover their significance. But a sensation of sickly cold came over him, his head swam, and he could hardly see the figures before his eyes. He suspected a sudden attack of influenza and went to ask his wife for medicine.

They were all in the drawing-room, Mrs. Corbett helping Nora and Jean with a new game, Dicky playing the pianola, and Mike, the Irish terrier, who had lately deserted his accustomed place on the dining-room hearth-rug, stretched by the fire.

He thought how like sheep they looked and sounded, nothing in his appearance in the mirror struck him as odd: it was their gaping faces that were unfamiliar. He then noticed the extraordinary behaviour of Mike, who had sprung from the hearth-rug and was crouched in the farthest corner uttering no sound, but with his eyes distended and foam round his bared teeth. Under Mr Corbett's glance he slunk towards the door, whimpering in a faint and abject manner, and then as his master called him he snarled horribly, and the hair bristled on the scruff of his neck.

"What *can* be the matter with Mike?" asked Mrs. Corbett.

Her question broke a silence that seemed to have lasted a long time. Jean began to cry. Mr. Corbett said irritably that he did not know what was the matter with any of them.

Then Nora asked: "What is that red mark on your face?"

He looked again in the glass and could see nothing.

"It's quite clear from here," said Dicky. "I can see the lines in the finger-print."

"Yes, that's what it is," said Mrs. Corbett in her brisk staccato voice: "the print of a finger on your forehead. Have you been writing in red ink?"

Mr. Corbett precipitately left the room for his own, where he sent down a message that he was suffering from headache and would have his dinner in bed. He wanted no one fussing round him. By next morning he was amazed at his fancies of influenza, for he had never felt so well in his life.

No one commented on his looks at breakfast, so that he concluded the mark had disappeared. The old Latin book he had been translating on the previous night had been moved from the writing bureau, although Dicky's grammar and dictionary were still there. The second shelf was, as always in the daytime, closely packed; the book had, he remembered,

been in the second shelf. But this time he did not ask who put it back.

That day he had an unexpected stroke of luck in a new client of the name of Crab, who entrusted him with large sums of money; nor was he irritated by the sight of his more prosperous acquaintances; but with difficulty refrained from grinning in their faces, so confident was he that his remarkable ability must soon place him higher than any of them. At dinner he chaffed his family with what he felt to be the gaiety of a schoolboy.

In spite of this new alertness, he could not attend to the letters he should have written that evening, and drifted to the bookcase for a little light distraction, but found that for the first time there was nothing he wished to read. He pulled out a book from above his head at random, and saw that it was the old Latin book in manuscript.

As he turned over its stiff and yellow pages, he noticed with pleasure the smell of corruption that had first repelled him in these decaying volumes, a smell, he now thought, of ancient and secret knowledge.

This idea of secrecy seemed to affect him personally, for on hearing a step in the hall he hastily closed the book and put it back in its place. He went to the schoolroom where Dicky was doing his homework and told him he required his Latin grammar and dictionary again for an old law report. To his annoyance he stammered and put his words awkwardly; he thought that the boy looked oddly at him and he cursed him in his heart for a suspicious young devil, though of what he should be suspicious he could not say. Nevertheless, when back in the dining-room, he listened at the door and then softly turned the lock before he opened the books on the writing bureau.

The script and Latin seemed much clearer than on the previous evening and he was able to read at random a passage relating to a trial of a German midwife in 1620 for the murder and dissection of 783 children.

It appeared to be an account of some secret society whose activities and ritual were of a nature so obscure, and when not, so vile and terrible, that Mr. Corbett would not at first believe that this could be a record of any human mind.

He read until far later than his usual hour for bed, and when at last he rose, it was with the book in his hands. To defer

his parting with it, he stood turning over the pages until he reached the end of the writing, and was struck by a new peculiarity.

The ink was much fresher and of a far poorer quality than the thick rusted ink in the bulk of the book; on close inspection he would have said that it was of modern manufacture and written quite recently, were it not for the fact that it was in the same crabbed late seventeenth century handwriting.

This, however, did not explain the perplexity, even dismay and fear he now felt as he started at the last sentence. It ran: *Continue te in perennibus studiis*, and he had at once recognized it as a Ciceronian tag that had been dinned into him at school. He could not understand how he had failed to notice it yesterday.

Then he remembered that the book had ended at the bottom of a page. But now, the last two sentences were written at the very top of a page. However long he looked at them, he could come to no other conclusion than that they had been added since the previous evening.

He now read the sentence before the last: *Re imperfecta mortuus sum*, and translated the whole as "I died with my purpose unachieved. Continue, thou, the never-ending studies."

With his eyes still fixed upon it, Mr. Corbett replaced the book on the writing bureau and stepped back from it to the door, his hand outstretched behind him, groping and then tugging at the door handle. As the door failed to open, his breath came in a faint, hardly articulate scream. Then he remembered that he had himself locked it, and he fumbled with the key in frantic ineffectual movements until at last he opened it and banged it after him as he plunged backwards into the hall.

For a moment he stood there looking at the door handle; then with a stealthy, sneaking movement, his hand crept out towards it, touched it, began to turn it, when suddenly he pulled his hand away and went up to his bedroom, three steps at a time.

There he hid his face in the pillow, cried and raved in meaningless words, repeating: "Never, never, never. I will never do it again. Help me never to do it again." With the words "Help me," he noticed what he was saying—they

reminded him of other words, and he began to pray aloud.

But the words sounded jumbled, they persisted in coming into his head in a reverse order so that he found he was saying his prayers backwards, and at this final absurdity he suddenly began to laugh very loud. He sat up on the bed, delighted at this return to sanity, common sense and humour, when the door leading into Mrs. Corbett's room opened, and he saw his wife staring at him with a strange, grey, drawn face that made her seem like the terror-stricken ghost of her usually smug and placid self.

"It's not burglars," he said irritably. "I've come to bed late, that is all, and must have wakened you."

"Henry," said Mrs. Corbett, and he noticed that she had not heard him: "Henry, didn't you hear it?"

"What?"

"That laugh."

He was silent, an instinctive caution warning him to wait until she spoke again. And this she did, imploring him with her eyes to reassure her.

"It was not a human laugh. It was like the laugh of a devil."

He checked his violent inclination to laugh again. It was wiser not to let her know that it was only his laughter she had heard. He told her to stop being fanciful, and Mrs. Corbett gradually recovered her docility.

The next morning, Mr. Corbett rose before any of the servants and crept down to the dining-room. As before, the dictionary and grammar alone remained on the writing bureau; the book was back on the second shelf. He opened it at the end. Two more lines had been added, carrying the writing down to the middle of the page. They ran:

*Ex auro canceris
In dentem elephantis*

Which he translated as:

Out of the money of the crab
Into the tooth of the elephant.

From this time on, his acquaintances in the City noticed a change in the mediocre, rather flabby and unenterprising "old Corbett." His recent sour depression dropped from him;

he seemed to have grown twenty years younger, strong, brisk, and cheerful, and with a self-confidence in business that struck them as lunacy. They waited with a not unpleasant excitement for the inevitable crash, but his every speculation, however wild and hare-brained, turned out successful.

He never stayed in town for dinners or theatres, for he was always now in a hurry to get home, where, as soon as he was sure of being undisturbed, he would take down the manuscript book from the second shelf of the dining-room and turn to the last pages.

Every morning he found that a few words had been added since the evening before, and always they formed, as he considered, injunction: to himself. These were at first only with regard to his money transactions, giving assurance to his boldest fancies, and since the brilliant and unforeseen success that had attended his gamble with Mr. Crab's money in African ivory, he followed all such advice unhesitatingly.

But presently, interspersed with these commands, were others of a meaningless, childish, yet revolting character, such as might be invented by a decadent imbecile.

He at first paid no attention to these directions, but found that his new speculations declined so rapidly that he became terrified not merely for his fortune but for his reputation and even safety, since the money of various of his clients was involved. It was made clear to him that he must follow the commands in the book altogether or not at all, and he began to carry out their puerile and grotesque blasphemies with a contemptuous amusement, which, however, gradually changed to a sense of their monstrous significance. They became more capricious and difficult of execution, but he now never hesitated to obey blindly, urged by a fear that he could not understand.

By now he understood the effect of this book on the others near it and the reason that had impelled its mysterious agent to move the books into the second shelf, so that all in turn should come under the influence of that ancient and secret knowledge.

In respect to it, he encouraged his children, with jeers at their stupidity, to read more, but he could not observe that they ever now took a book from the dining-room book-case. He himself no longer needed to read, but went to bed early and slept soundly. The things that all his life he had longed

to do when he should have enough money now seemed to him insipid. His most exciting pleasure was the smell and touch of these mouldering pages, as he turned them to find the last message inscribed to him.

One evening it was in two words only : *Canem occide*.

He laughed at this simple and pleasant request to kill the dog, for he bore Mike a grudge for his change from devotion to slinking aversion. Moreover, it could not have come more opportunely, since in turning out an old desk he had just discovered some packets of rat poison bought years ago and forgotten. He whistled light-heartedly as he ran upstairs to rummage for the packets, and returned to empty one in the dog's dish of water in the hall.

That night the household was awakened by terrified screams proceeding from the stairs. Mr. Corbett was the first to hasten there, prompted by the instinctive caution that was always with him these days. He saw Jean, in her night-dress, scrambling up on to the landing on her hands and knees, clutching at anything that afforded support and screaming in a choking, tearless, unnatural manner. He carried her to the room she shared with Nora, where they were quickly followed by Mrs. Corbett.

Nothing coherent could be got from Jean. Nora said that she must have been having her old dream again : when her father demanded what this was, she said that Jean sometimes woke in the night, crying, because she had dreamed of a hand passing backwards and forwards over the dining-room book-case, until it found a certain book and took it out of the shelf. At this point she was always so frightened that she woke up.

On hearing this, Jean broke into fresh screams, and Mrs. Corbett would have no more explanations. Mr. Corbett went out on to the stairs to find wha' had brought the child there from her bed. On looking down into the lighted hall he saw Mike's dish overturned. He went down to examine it and saw that the water he had poisoned must have been upset and absorbed by the rough doormat, which was quite wet.

He went back to the little girls' room, told his wife that she was tired and must go to bed, and he would now take his turn at comforting Jean. She was now much quieter. He took her on his knee, where at first she shrank from him. Mr.

Corbett remembered with an awed sense of injury that she never now sat on his knee, and would have liked to pay her out for it by mocking and frightening her. But he had to coax her into telling him what he wanted, and with this object he soothed her, calling her by pet names that he thought he had forgotten, telling her that nothing could hurt her now he was with her. He listened to what he had at last induced her to tell him.

She and Nora had kept Mike with them all the evening and taken him to sleep in their room for a treat. He had lain at the foot of Jean's bed and they had all gone to sleep. Then Jean began her old dream of the hand moving over the books in the dining-room bookcase; but instead of taking out a book it came across the dining-room and out on to the stairs. It came up over the banisters and to the door of their room, and turned their door handle very softly and opened it. At this point she jumped up, wide awake, and turned on the light, calling to Nora. The door, which had been shut when they went to sleep, was wide open, and Mike was gone.

She told Nora that she was sure something dreadful would happen to him if she did not go and bring him back, and ran down into the hall, where she saw him just about to drink from his dish. She called to him and he looked up, but did not come, so she ran to him and began to pull him along with her when her nightdress was clutched from behind and then she felt a hand seize her arm.

She fell down and then clambered upstairs as fast as she could, screaming all the way.

It was now clear to Mr. Corbett that Mike's dish must have been upset in the scuffle. She was again crying, but this time he felt himself unable to comfort her. He retired to his room, where he walked up and down in an agitation he could not understand.

"I am not a bad man," he kept saying to himself. "I have never done anything actually wrong. My clients are none the worse for my speculations, only the better."

Presently he added: "It is not wrong to try and kill a dog, an ill-tempered brute. It turned against me. It might have bitten Jeannie."

He noticed that he had thought of her as Jeannie which he had not done for some time; it must have been because he had called her that to-night. He must forbid her ever to

leave her room at night ; he could not have her meddling. It would be safer for him if she were not there at all.

Again that sick and cold sensation of fear swept over him ; he seized the bed-post as though he were falling, and held on to it for some minutes. "I was thinking of a boarding school," he told himself, and then, "I must go down and find out—find out——" He would not think what it was he must find out.

He opened his door and listened. The house was quiet. He crept on to the landing and along to Nora's and Jean's door, where again he stood, listening. There was no sound, and at that he was again overcome with unreasonable terror. He imagined Jean lying very still in her bed, too still. He hastened away from the door, shuffling in his bedroom slippers along the passage and down the stairs.

A bright fire still burned in the dining-room grate. A glance at the clock told him it was not yet twelve. He stared at the book-case. In the second shelf was a gap which had not been there when he had left. On the writing bureau lay a large open book. He knew that he must cross the room and see what was written in it. Then, as before, words that he did not intend came sobbing and crying to his lips, muttering "No, no, not that. Never, never, never." But he crossed the room and looked down at the book. As last time, the message was in only two words : "*Infantem occide.*"

He slipped and fell forwards against the bureau. His hands clutched at the book, lifted it as he recovered himself, and with his finger he traced out the words that had been written. The smell of corruption crept into his nostrils. He told himself that he was not a snivelling dotard but a man stronger and wiser than his fellows, superior to the common emotions of humanity, who held in his hands the sources of ancient and secret power.

He had known what the message would be. It was after all the only safe and logical thing to do. Jean had acquired dangerous knowledge. She was a spy, an antagonist. That she was so unconsciously, that she was eight years old, his youngest and favourite child, were sentimental appeals that could make no difference to a man of sane reasoning power such as his own.

Jean had sided with Mike against him. "All that are not for me are against me," he repeated softly. He would kill

both dog and child with the white powder that no one knew to be in his possession.

He laid down the book and went to the door. What he had to do he would do quickly, for again that sensation of deadly cold was sweeping over him. He wished he had not to do it to-night; last night it would have been easier, but to-night she had sat on his knee and made him afraid. 'He imagined her lying very still in her bed, too still.

He held on to the door-handle but his fingers seemed to have grown numb, for he could not turn it. He clung to it, crouched and shivering, bending over it until he knelt on the ground, his head beneath the handle which he still clutched with upraised hands. Suddenly the hands were loosened and flung outwards with the frantic gesture of a man falling from a great height, and he stumbled to his feet.

He seized the book and threw it on the fire. A violent sensation of choking overcame him, he felt he was being strangled, as in a nightmare he tried again and again to shriek aloud, but his breath would make no sound. His breath would not come at all. He fell backwards heavily down on the floor, where he lay very still.

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In the morning the maid who came to open the dining-room windows found her master dead. The sensation caused by this was scarcely so great in the City as that given by the simultaneous collapse of all Mr. Corbett's recent speculations. It was instantly assumed that he must have had previous knowledge of this and so committed suicide.

The stumbling-block of this theory was that the medical report defined the cause of Mr. Corbett's death as strangulation of the windpipe by the pressure of a hand which had left the marks of its fingers on his throat.

H. A. MANHOOD

Crack o' Whips

CRACK o' WHIPS

MUTTERING angrily at the crawling progress of a hawkster in his path, his bleak, thin-lipped gipsy face rippling in a kind of agony under his smart bowler hat, Squaler Adams swung his circus-painted van out of the Whitechapel-road between high, dingy walls into the Swan and Abbot Yard.

Children skipped before him, abusing him aggressively for destroying a grotto of dirt and stones and flowers built on a manhole cover exactly in the middle of the yard, but he hardly noticed them, stopping tumultuously outside the shabby balconied tavern from which the yard drew its name.

Dogs barked inside the van as it stopped, but a rapping word from Squaler quietened them. Lighting a new cigarette from a dragged butt, he stiff-stepped to the door, and the publican, fat, bald as nothing, and timid under his merriness, looked up from his betting slips with jocular surprise :

"Well, well, if it ain't Squaler himself ! Welcome, m'boy !"

"Mister Adams to you," Squaler said with vicious distinctness.

"All right, all right ! But ain't I your friend ?"

"Friend ?" Squaler forked his fingers derisively. "I ain't got any and I don't need any."

To hell with you, then, the publican thought, but he did not say so: "Well, I'm sorry you feel that way about it," he sighed. "Here, have a drink." He beckoned Squaler into the sour-pickled bar-room. "What's the almighty trouble ?" he asked cautiously, glad that somebody had knocked Squaler at last. "What's gone wrong with your schedule ? Thought you were booked for a northern circuit. Squaler Adams and His World-famous Troupe of Performing Poodles . . . saw it in the gossip meself."

The publican poured again and spat clumsily, surprised at his own daring, hating Squaler, but afraid of him, too,

consoling himself with the thought that he brought good, profitable custom to the house. Astonishing how much he could drink ; and it all went to his eyes so that they seemed to float in pure gin, cold, bright, and hard like poisonous crystals.

Fully aware of all that the publican was thinking, Squaler drank gulpingly, spitefully amused, cunningly enslaving him with an offhanded explanation : "I want that yard of yours for a week or two, private, see? Couple of falls broke back stage in a damned four-penny joint ; killed Six and Seven, two of my best. Busted my show. Someone done it on purpose."

"Terrible bad luck, Mister Adams." (God help 'em, whoever it was !)

"But worse for them," Squaler sneered, and a gold tooth glimmering like a shot in waiting.

"The management wouldn't listen when I talked compensation. Maybe they wish they had nix, the swine !" Smoothly he pulled a newspaper—a smudgy country sheet—from his pocket, spreading it on the puddled counter : "Act o' God, in a manner of speaking," he jeered, and drank again.

Gapingly the publican read of a disastrous fire which had occurred, cause unknown, two dead, in an up-country theatre, and he stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets and scratched nervously to ease a creeping of flesh. He thought how he'd take perishing good care to keep on the right side of such a knife-minded cove.

Satisfied with the publican's expression, Squaler lit another cigarette, poking the smoking butt into a convenient knot-hole as if to show how simple it was to start fire : "Is Jimmy, the Dose about?"

"Not right handy." The publican trod upon the cigarette-end with difficulty and eyed a fly-specked clock-face : "He'll be in Mike's poolroom for sure."

"Get one of those brats to take these to him, then." Reaching across the mahogany, Squaler pulled two fluffy white paper chrysanthemums from a vase : "Two more for Squaler Adams. He'll know all about it." He added a shilling as compensation for the messenger, but the publican, smirking appreciatively, foxily substituted a halfpenny on his way to the door (just to pay for the flowers), calling with windy authority, sending an urchin running.

When he returned Squaler was gazing at an advertisement

for whisky in which a dancing girl leaned seductively, his left eye half-closed against the fumes of his cigarette.

"You ought to get one like that for the good of the house," he said.

"Yes, Mister Adams."

"You'd be able to sell much worse gin than this and no one would notice it. I want that room facing the yard and something to eat as soon as I've parked the van and the dogs, understand?"

The publican nodded, one eye on the clock: "D'you happen to know anything for the two-thirty?" he asked with pathetic hope.

"Red Label 'll make it," Squaler snapped and turned into the yard and the publican scribbled gratefully. The lists completed and despatched, his thoughts skated uneasily. Just like something out of a nightmare this Squaler was for all his smart, tight-fitting clothes, bow ties and thin-soled, pointed yellow boots. A Chinese Judas, that's what he was! But he knew something about training dogs. They did what he wanted them to; they just had to else that whip of his flicked the life out of 'em! Ah, well. He sighed and spat, wholeheartedly, very glad that he was not a poodle in Squaler's string, lumbering into the kitchen to bully-drive his humming tub of a wife, send her skipping for some of that salt fish Squaler was so fond of.

Out in the yard the tawdry-painted van buzzed and backed, roaring through the gateway into the inner yard as if it too had been well-trained by Squaler, children scattering noisily, assembling in the gateway in curiosity, clutching handbills snatched from the van, unafraid of Squaler and hopeful of entertainment.

But Squaler slammed the gate upon them before loosing his poodles from the kennel boxes in the van. At a word the seven dogs ceased in their wanderings, grouping together at the foot of the high brick wall, pathetically alert, gazing patiently, hungrily, determined to understand to avoid punishment. Squaler brought a stinking lump of beef and a bag of coarse biscuits and sprung the blade of his knife, calling the dogs to him one by one: "Here, One!" examining mouth, ears and paws, feeding it meat and sending it back to its place against the wall with a biscuit to be eaten at ease: "Here, Two!" The meat distributed without the need for

punishment, he lifted the kennel boxes from the van, clearing a space of pub-litter and ranging them against the wall as they were numbered, ordering the dogs into them, using his fist cruelly when Eight, puzzled by the missing pair, entered Number Six. Filling a pan with water from a wall-tap he ordered them to drink, again by numbers, forcing obedience with a whip. Back again to the boxes and then, as they were called, they must take their places in line for a circus-trot upon their hind legs, bowing in time with the threatening whip.

But the yard was breathless, full of sour furnace heats. Summer hung over the city like a suffocating depth of blue wool. The rumbling of traffic, women's voices, cross-stitched in gossip, the foot-race of heavy-shod children about a barrel-organ, a tapping from the cobbler's shop in a corner of the yard; all came thickly, sluggishly, as if sound itself were oppressed. More children stood under a line of newly watered window-boxes, poised in strange cactus shapes, mouths open to catch the drips, a frieze symbolizing the need of the world and its everlasting dependence upon an offhanded power on high.

Soon Squaler wanted to drink again, and the dogs were ordered to their boxes. Whip in hand he entered the Swan and Abbot by a side door, nodding to the bookmakers and their shabby runners accounting at the bar. The publican grunted gleefully, excitedly, whispering good news: "Red Label won all right."

"The tip's worth a quart then—gin, man, gin, not hop-water."

The publican regretted his enthusiasm: "Jimmy the Dose has got the goods and will bring 'em along after dark."

"Good!" Squaler tapped a fat shoulder with the grease-smooth handle of his whip: "The best gin, mind."

Alone in a musty, broken-ceilinged room dreary with many spotted mirrors, with ragged-curtained windows overlooking the inner yard, Squaler hung his coat and collar upon a dusty staghorn and sat down to eat and drink, still wearing his bowler hat and with his feet mounted on the sofa bed.

While he ate he read an old newspaper methodically from page to page—news, advertisements, every inch. Sweeping a space clear on the table, he took an old pack of cards from his pocket, jerked them free of a red silk garter, and shuffled them for a game of solitaire, playing without change of

expression, even as he had read the newspaper, a cigarette drooping and smoking like the wick of a short-lived soul. Occasionally his hand reached for his glass, but his eyes did not lift from the cards for more than the moment necessary to drink.

The dogs in the yard under the window made no sound. Sometimes a pot rattled in the kitchen as if protesting against greater heat. Pedlars bawled in the outer yard, offering and selling the most unlikely articles. Towards six o'clock the tide of sound from the main road increased as factory workers scattered homewards, dwindling again, then beginning on a new, brisker note two hours later when the workers, refreshed and smartened, emerged in search of amusement. Mothers called their children to bed, and the children hooted dismally, pleading the folly of bed while light remained.

At dusk Jimmy the Dose, tall and dignified, sauntered into Swan and Abbot Yard, a trembling white poodle under each arm.

Stolen two days before from a West End district, the two animals sadly missed the freedom and luxury to which they had been accustomed. But Jimmy didn't care. He couldn't afford to be sympathetic. He'd bought them cheap, and meant to sell them dear like any other trader. Squaler would soon alter their looks so that even the duchess who'd lately owned 'em wouldn't recognize 'em. A bit of luck having two right ones in stock, else it would have meant hunting for a pair, which would have been awkward with most of the gentry out of town.

Being in the dog business was very instructive one way and another to a man of a humorously philosophical turn of mind. Pick up a finicky, scented, gold-collared pup of some squinting, fancy breed and you got a good idea of what the owner was like; that led to amiable speculation between the so-called high and low, to a mental switching of persons and the birth of conclusions neither pompous nor ludicrous, but certainly of a kind of unforeseen by Marx or his later gossellers.

Jimmy, well but curiously educated, had become a receiver of stolen dogs out of sheer amusing necessity. The business, linking two worlds, kept his mind intelligently alive and, moreover, he loved the good-natured 'Tower Hamlets better than the gilded, false-crusted West. He looked forward to and attended dog shows in a spirit of gleeful inquiry, and was often mistaken for a peer, although it pleased him better on

other grounds to be mistaken for a successful bookmaker.

Once inside the Swan and Abbot Jimmy bundled the two poodles under one arm, tipped his derby to the company, and asked for water, cold, pure, and lovely for the bowels. Accustomed to such a request, knowing that the water would be paid for at a champagne rate, the publican filled a glass and jerked a thumb towards a door in an angle of a passage. Refreshed and happy at the prospect of profit, Jimmy barked and howled merrily outside the door before entering, but his humour was wasted on the gloomy Squaler, who merely nodded and looked critically at the poodles.

"Not bad," he grumbled, and Jimmy gaped and echoed him indignantly.

"Not bad! Lord love us! D'you know where they came from?" His long, pump face puckered haughtily; he sniffed delicately, stroked back an imaginary ringlet of hair and peered quizzingly through a key-ring. "Have you no better quality parchment, young man? And I would like a monk to illuminate the pedigree for me. . . ."

But Squaler wasn't amused: "How much?"

"Twenty quid."

From a thin twist of notes Squaler counted out ten.

Jimmy recounted them: "You only want one dog?" he asked innocently, although the price of one was adequate for the two.

He had prudently, on principle, asked twice as much as he was prepared to accept.

"Have a drink," Squaler grunted, and turned again to examination of the poodles.

"But I said twenty," Jimmy wailed realistically, pathetically. "Dammit, there's a reward of a tanner offered for 'em."

But Squaler did not seem to hear. He had gripped the two poodles by their muzzles, forcing their gaze, breathing frightening spurts of smoke into their eyes. Looking at him Jimmy felt suddenly very empty and unsafe, as if he were standing on a sucking sponge. He was glad to break his rule and drink and forget the question of price. Tough luck on the dogs, but they'd get used to it. Perhaps someone or something would take an equal crack at Squaler one fine day, balance things up, although it would need more pluck than Jimmy felt that he himself possessed.

An ugly, spider-minded devil. Always a bad sign when a

man drank so much alone. With a curt "So long," Jimmy went away, hand tight on the notes in his pocket, as if he were afraid that Squaler would come snatching, with those gin-soaked eyes of his.

Alone again Squaler grinned evilly to himself and lit the two gas jets, standing one of the two shrinking, frightened poodles upon the table among the food and cards, talking steadily to it in a queer, thready voice, cigarette bobbing menacingly, stopping sometimes to rap out its new name of Six, clipping and trimming its fashionable tufts to match the rest of his troupe, finally stencilling six irregular patches upon its shaven body with gipsy-ink, cuffing it brutally when it backed and wriggled, planting it helplessly high on a tall bamboo stand while he worked on the second dog.

The transformation complete, Seven marked with seven patches and clipped to a new smartness, Squaler dumped them through the window into the yard, climbing after them with his whip. The light cast through the open window might have been a furnace mouth, so frenziedly did the dogs seek to avoid it. Squaler called to them, and they cringed and raced, but the whip caught up with them, snapping and biting cruelly so that they were glad to creep from sight into the kennel boxes assigned to them. Scenting newcomers the rest of the troupe whined and fidgeted, but a word, which was like a small echo of the whip, was sufficient to quell them.

Dropping the doots of the boxes Squaler climbed back through the window, drinking and waiting. After a few minutes the two poodles yapped miserably, and at once he reached out, shaking the whip terrifyingly over their boxes. Silence, and then they dared to bark again in their loneliness, and once more the lash hissed and crackled. But still they did not understand; foolishly they scratched and whined in miserable chorus. But this time Squaler did not use the whip. Hopping through the window he silently grabbed the poodles one after the other, muzzling them tightly so that any sort of sound was impossible.

Returning through the window, he gulped the last of the gin, kicked off his boots and lay back on the narrow, creaking sofa, watching the flies on the blotched ceiling unwinkingly, presently dozing, then sleeping, the gas jets hissing over him like watchful, guardian snakeheads.

Waking late to the tap of the publican's wife on the door,

Squaler stretched and spat and reached for a cigarette, calling curtly to her to enter. She did so, her loose slippers slurring as if phrasing her contempt, bringing newspapers, salt fried fish and thick, gritty coffee, pursing her fat purple lips as she turned out the gas jets and raked together the stubs scattered over floor and table, gathering up empty glass and bottle and leaving the room with a word.

Squaler had hardly noticed her. Morosely he picked up a newspaper, reading, smoking and drinking the bitter coffee, munching sugar between gulps, tossing fish and bread into the yard for the later benefit of his dogs.

Already the sun was riding high, flooding an unrefreshed world with new scorching heat. Good beach-milking weather. Squaler cursed at the bad luck that kept him training when he might have been earning easy money along the coast spinning the holiday crowds.

No sense in carrying on with only seven dogs though, since they were used to working in a pack of nine. Quicker to train two new dogs than to teach the old ones new places.

Gruntingly he found his boots and pulled them on, not bothering to lace them, taking up his hat and whip, climbing through the window. Seven of the dogs moved and shook themselves in their boxes and Squaler released them methodically. But Six and Seven were crouched sadly.

Briskly Squaler unstrapped the muzzles, talking bitingly, naming the dogs often, forcing attention with his fist, bundling them out to join the wandering troupe, recalling them after a minute, singling them out with the whip, cracking it about them so that the tip of the lash just seared them, the dust of the yard rising gustily as if in horror. They tried to join the remaining, watchful seven, but the whip formed an angry, living fence, a cage almost in which they were trapped.

They howled mournfully, and nosed each other, puzzled by the faint, scented smell of each other, by a memory of comfort which would not fit with this new slashing voice and whip. Then, when they were near to hysteria, Squaler unexpectedly gave them meat, effacing detail from their minds, leaving only broad fear of the whip and the beginning of understanding that they must obey.

Meat to all the troupe and then Squaler leaned and smoked, grimly amused that the seven old stagers were contemptuous of the newcomers, even though their sex was inviting.

So well had he trained them, implanted his own attitude of mind. Watching, he heard a sound from the near gate, and saw that it was ajar, saw a red head peeping between. A lightning jerk of the wrist and he had sent the whistling lash within an inch of the inquisitive upturned nose, and the boy jerked back in alarm, squawking indignantly.

"Hi! What d'yer think you're playing at?"

Squaler grinned maliciously: "Get to hell out of here!"

"Aw, guv'nor, have a heart. Lemme watch you training 'em. I'll sit pretty. God's honour."

A foot hammered impatiently at the door. Squaler swore threateningly. The boy grumbled and went away, and Squaler set to work, strapping Six and Seven in strange harness, controlling their movements by leading strings, cracking his whip cruelly when they dragged and jibed.

Simple movements at first which, even when performed successfully, earned no reward except brief respite. Squaler didn't believe in payment for results when he could make 'em hop without. They improved. Squaler brought out a step ladder, calling one of the older dogs, ordering it by a crack of the whip and a sign to climb the ladder, to pause, bark three times, naming itself, and somersault away. He led Six to the ladder, cracking his whip about its reluctant haunches. It mounted one step; again the whip; two steps and then suddenly it scrambled out of control, for a second whip had begun to crack in the outer yard, loudly and confusingly, so that the dogs were bewildered.

Furiously Squaler wrenched open the gate. The red-headed boy was cracking an improvised whip gleefully. Squaler pounced, intending to snatch the whip and punish the boy, but the boy evaded him easily, flourishing the whip impertinently as he ran away. Defeated, Squaler returned, slamming the door, cracking his own whip to restore order, bruising dog after dog until they were obedient and in line.

But no sooner did he begin again than a second whip cracked in opposition, then another, for Redhead had quickly proved to others the peculiar joys of whip-cracking. The dogs were puzzled and unmanageable. Squaler opened the door, lacing his own whip among the running children. But they were too quick for him. Jeeringly they raced before him and dared to strike back.

Angrily Squaler returned once more to the inner yard.

The publican brought him gin and sympathized profusely, regretting that there was nothing *he* could do to stop the nuisance: "You know what kids are. You'd have done the same thing yourself once (and a damned sight worse!). If you was to promise 'em a show later on . . . needn't keep your promise, of course."

But Squaler saw no sense in compromise: "If I catch 'em.

...
Viciously he attempted to force the poodles to obey his own whip and voice only, but the cross-cracking from the outer yard increased steadily and the dogs blundered confusedly. More and more children found sticks and cords, cracking lashes in merry competition until Swan and Abbot Yard echoed thornily.

Accustomed as the tenants of the yard were to noises of various kinds, and healthily aroused by the present exhibition, no one but Squaler objected. Helplessly he drank and raged. If only he could lay hands on Redhead. . . .

Cunningly he presently kennelled the dogs and opened the door of the inner yard slightly, waiting within easy reach. Sure enough the boy came and peered unsuspectingly inside. Instantly Squaler caught him, dragging him inside, spinning him across the yard, kicking the door shut and standing before it, picking up his whip, slashing at the reeling boy so that bloody weals appeared on the healthy pink of his cheeks. The boy shrieked and cowered under the whip, running blindly, yelping loudly for assistance.

At once the many whips ceased to crack. There was a bumping and muttering and appeals to "Give us a bunk up here, Bert." Heads appeared over the wall, hands placed carefully among the broken glass topping. Redhead hawled again and they climbed higher, dropping over the wall. More children shoved against the door, forcing it open, sending Squaler sprawling, two dozen angry children prancing excitedly. Licking his bleeding lips, Redhead pointed to Squaler and they crowded upon him, slashing and kicking.

"You dirty swine, you!"

Overwhelmed, Squaler pounded with the butt of his whip, but the whip was promptly dragged from his hands. He kicked and punched, but the children were too many. He staggered and fell under their united hammering and Redhead, assuming command, shrilled an order:

"Hold him down!"

Obediently the children, boys of all ages with several lusty girls among them, dragged strongly at Squaler's limbs so that he was stretched flat, kneeling heavily so that all his strength was useless.

"Quick! Hold the gate, two of you!"

For the publican was coming, not too quickly, with one or two others, alarmed by the uproar.

"Now!" Redhead spat briskly: "Hold his fist, you!" He fingered the weals tenderly and spat again, this time upon Squaler: "Fond of the whip, ain't you? Time you knew better. We ain't dogs and you ain't God, sec? Hold hard!"

Very deliberately he stamped twice upon Squaler's wrist with all his weight, his iron shoe boots breaking bone easily. Squaler moaned in startled agony, writhing helplessly. But the boy was merciless. A careful poising above the second wrist and his boot came crashing, smashing.

Then, at a word, the children jumped up, diving triumphantly through the gate and yard into the merry freedom of the street.

A. M. BURRAGE

Nobody's House

The Black Diamond Tree

NOBODY'S HOUSE

THEY faced each other across the threshold of the great door in the dimness of two meagre lights. It was just dusk on a windy autumn evening, and Mrs. Park, the caretaker, had brought a candle with her to answer the summons at the door. Behind the stranger the last grey light of the day filtered through veils of dingy, low-flying clouds. Between them the candle flame fluttered in the draught like a yellow pennon, the cavernous darkness of the hall advancing and retreating like some monster at once curious and shy.

The man was tall and broad and seemingly in the early fifties. He wore a grey moustache and beard, both closely trimmed, and his black velvet hat was pulled low down over a high forehead. His overcoat was cut to an old-fashioned pattern, having a cape to it and it was perhaps this which lent him an air of—even at his years—having outlived his age.

He was fumbling in an inside pocket when the door was opened, and he said nothing until he had produced an envelope.

"I have an order from Messrs. Flake and Limepenny to see the house." Here he offered Mrs. Park the envelope. "I am afraid I have called at an inopportune time, but I missed one train and the next arrived late. Perhaps, however, you won't mind showing me over?"

He spoke slowly and a little nervously, as if he were repeating a speech which he had previously prepared. His voice was very low and mellowed and gentle. Mrs. Park stood back from the threshold.

"Will you come in, sir?" she said. "I am afraid you won't be seeing the house at its best. I shall have to show you over by candle; there is no gas or electric light."

He stepped inside and scrutinized her. She was a tall,

gaunt, middle-aged woman of the kind which is generally described as "superior". Nature had intended her to become matron of an institute. Fate and widowhood had forced her a rung or two down the ladder. She looked what she was—honest, hard-working, and almost devoid of sympathy.

"I'm afraid," she added in her hard, toneless voice, "you'll find everything just anyhow. I wasn't expecting anybody. Very few people come here nowadays. And a place of this size takes more than one pair of hands to keep it clean."

"It has been empty a long time, then?" he hazarded.

"Ever since——" She checked herself suddenly. "For more than twenty years, I should think." She turned her shoulder upon him, lifting the candle above her head. "This is supposed to be a fine hall, and everybody admires the staircase. If the house doesn't find a tenant or a purchaser soon, I hear they intend removing the staircase and selling it separately. There is a lot of nice oak panelling, too. The library——"

Turning to see if he were listening, she saw him start and shiver and rub his long, thin hands together.

"Excuse me," he said. "I have been a long time in the train and I am very cold. I wonder if it would be troubling you too much to get me a cup of tea."

"Yes, I could do that," she answered. "The kettle is on, for I intended having one myself. Will you come this way? Perhaps you would like a warm by the fire?"

She led the way across the hall and through a baize-covered door at the end. Turning once to see if she were giving him sufficient light, Mrs. Park noticed that he walked with a slight limp.

He followed her down a short passage, through a great kitchen ruddy with firelight, down another passage, and into a small room intended to be used as a housekeeper's parlour. Here there was warmth, even stuffiness. A paraffin lamp stood burning on a flaming red table-cloth.

The room was full of hideous modern cottage furniture, and decorated largely with the portraits of people who ought to have known better than to be photographed. But a fire burned brightly in the grate and a kettle on a brass trivet murmured and rattled its lid. This commonplace room lighted and hot and over-furnished, was at least a relief from the dark passage and the draughty, gloom-ridden hall.

"I'll give you your tea in here, sir, and take mine in the kitchen," the caretaker said.

"Nonsense. Why should you? Besides, I want to talk. Oh, here's the order to view. You see . . . Mr. Stephen Royds—that's my name . . . to view. . . ."

He was running his thumbnail along the sheet of heavily headed office note-paper. Mrs. Park glanced perfunctorily at the typewriting. So far as she was concerned, an order to view was a superfluous formality. She was more interested in this Mr. Royds, who, having removed his hat, disclosed a head of sparse iron-grey hair. He spoke like a gentleman but there was nothing opulent in his appearance. He looked an unlikely purchaser or tenant; but for that matter she had never been able to visualize the sort of person whom the house would suit.

"I'll remove my greatcoat if you don't mind," he said while Mrs. Park went to a cupboard for another cup and saucer. "The room is warm." He laid the coat across the back of a chair. "Do you live here entirely alone?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you—nervous?"

She looked up sharply.

"Nervous? What is there to be nervous about?"

"I didn't know. Some people cannot bear loneliness. Can you tell me why the house has been on the market all these years?"

Mrs. Park smiled grimly.

"That's easy enough," she said. "It's nobody's house."

"What do you mean—nobody's house?"

"People who can afford to keep up a great house like this generally want land along with it. There isn't any land. People who don't want land can't afford to keep up a house like this. The estate was sold to Major Skirting. He's a house of his own. He's let the land and he's been trying to let or sell the house ever since. I've shown hundreds over but nobody's ever thought twice about taking it."

"Strange. It's a good house. But the land . . . yes I quite follow you. Whom used it to belong to?"

Mrs. Park set the cup and saucer down upon the table with a rattle.

"A gentleman named Harboys," she said; and suddenly stood rigid, her head a little on one side, in an attitude of listening.

"Do you hear anything?" he asked sharply.

"No, I'll make the tea."

"I suppose you sometimes fancy you hear things?"

She bent over the kettle, giving him no answer. He waited until the teapot was full and then gently repeated the question.

"Hear things?" she repeated with some show of asperity.

"No. Why should I?"

"I didn't know. These empty old houses. . . ."

"I'm not one of the fanciful sort, sir. . . . Will you help yourself to milk and sugar?"

She let him see that the talk had veered in a direction contrary to her liking. There was veiled fear in her eyes, and, watching her intently, he could see that she was not impervious to loneliness. There was a woman who suffered more than she knew. She could bluff her nerves by sheer will-power, but this will-power was steadily losing in the long battle. Mrs. Park was afraid of something, and always, in her inner consciousness, fighting against that fear.

"Thank you," the stranger said, taking the cup and saucer. "Who was this Harboys? Is he still alive?"

"I couldn't say."

"Isn't there some story about the house?"

"I don't know."

"Forgive me. I think you do."

"There are stories. . . . You don't need to listen. . . ."

She spoke jerkily. Once more he remarked that look in her eyes.

"Tell me," he said gently.

"I can't sir. If Major Skitting knew I told people I should lose my job. He'd think I was trying to prevent people from taking the house."

"It wouldn't prevent me. Wasn't this Harboys supposed to have shot——"

"Ah!" She set cup and saucer down with a rattle. "Then you've heard something already, sir!"

"A little. You had better tell me all. It will not affect me as a prospective purchaser."

Mrs. Park passed a hand across her forehead.

"I don't like talking about it, sir. You see, I live here all alone. . . ."

She checked herself suddenly, finding herself about to admit

to a second person something which she never confessed even to herself.

"Just so," Royds said sympathetically. "And you sometimes hear noises? What noises?"

"Oh, it's imagination," she said. "Or the wind. Sometimes the wind sounds like footsteps and voices, and sometimes I seem to hear. . . . It may be a loose door somewhere that bangs."

He leaned forward, his eyes shining with the excitement of some strange fascination.

"You mean you hear a shot fired?" he asked, scarcely above a whisper.

Her one hand resting on the tablecloth contracted nervously.

"I've known it sound like a shot. Oh, I don't believe. . . ."

"They say the house is haunted?" he asked eagerly.

"They say. . . . Oh, when there's been a tragedy happen in a house people will always—"

"Never mind what people say. What do *you* say?" The timbre of his voice had changed; under excitement it had hardened, grown louder. "Is the house haunted?"

There was something compelling in Royds's gaze, in the new tone of his voice. She answered him sullenly, helplessly.

"I don't know. I've heard things. I tell myself they're nothing." She groped for a handkerchief. "I've *got* to tell myself they're nothing."

"You haven't—*seen* anything?" he asked, in a low, strained, voice.

"No, thank God! I never go near the library after dark."

"The library? So it was there. Tell me."

Mrs. Park gulped some tea and replenished her cup with a shaking hand.

"It must have been about twenty years ago," she said in a low and curiously unwilling tone. "The place belonged to a Mr. Gerald Harboys. He was quite young—not much more than thirty, and very well liked. Some said he was a bit queer, but there was a strain of queerness in all the Harboys. Mad on hunting, he was, and one of the best riders in these parts. You'll be surprised at the size of the stables when you see them. He had them built.

"He'd married a young wife, one of the Miss Greys from

Hornfield Manor, and some say he thought more of her than he did of his horses. She used to ride, too, and the pair of them, and Mr. Peter Marsh from Brinkchurch, were always together.

"Harboys and Marsh had known each other since they were in the cradle. Whether there was really anything between Marsh and Mrs. Harboys I don't know. There's been arguments about that for years, but they're both dead and gone now, and nobody will ever know.

"About one Christmas-time Harboys took a fall in the hunting field and broke his leg and it was during his convalescence that he got into one of his queer moods. I dare say it was being kept out of the hunting field which brought it on. His leg mended slowly, and right at the end of January he could only just get about with a stick.

"Mrs. Harboys followed the hounds every time there was a meet in the neighbourhood, and, with her husband unable to get about, she saw more of Peter Marsh than usual. But nobody seemed to know that Mr. Harboys was jealous or that he suspected anything wrong.

"Well, one day, at the end of January, Mrs. Harboys went out hunting, and her husband brooded all day over the library fire. During the afternoon he amused himself by cleaning a revolver, which he afterwards laid aside on the mantelpiece within reach.

"Mrs. Harboys came in just after dark. Peter Marsh had been piloting her, and she brought him with her. While she was ordering tea and poached eggs to be sent up to the morning-room, she sent Peter Marsh into the library to get himself a whisky, and tell Mr. Harboys about the day's hunting. He had not been in the library a minute, when angry voices were heard and then a shot.

"The butler then burst into the room and found Peter Marsh lying dead, and Mr. Harboys, still in his chair before the fire, staring wildly at the body, with the revolver in his hand."

She paused, and in the silence she heard Royds breathing heavily. His head was bent and his gaze lowered to the near edge of the table, so that she could scarcely see his face.

"Mr. Harboys," she resumed, "pleaded not guilty at the trial and said that his mind was a blank at the time when the shot was fired. He couldn't remember anything that had

happened between Marsh coming into the room and then the butler bending over the dead body. His counsel put in a plea for insanity, but the jury would not have it. They found him guilty and added a recommendation to mercy. The death penalty was changed to penal servitude for life."

She broke off and began to muse, knitting her brows.

"That must be twenty years ago. . . . They let them out after twenty years. He's out already, or soon will be, if he's alive."

Slowly Royds lifted his head and turned burning eyes upon her face.

"And do you think Harboys did it?" he demanded.

The question took Mrs. Park aback.

"Of course! Why! How else could it have happened? There was only those two in the room. It couldn't have happened any other way."

Royds got upon his legs. His pale face shining with little drops of moisture, his eyes aflame with a strange passion.

"I swear to you," he cried, "that I don't believe Harboys did it. I knew the men—"

Mrs. Park's stare intensified and she uttered a smothered exclamation.

"—— I knew him well as child and boy and man. I was at school with Harboys. I tell you he was incapable of murder! All the circumstantial evidence in the world would not weigh an atom with me against my knowledge of his character. They say he had fits of madness. Another lie! But mad or sane he couldn't have done it. He loved his wife—and old Peter Marsh. He knew that they were two of God's best and whitest people. I tell you—"

He broke off suddenly and lowered his voice.

"I'm frightening you," he said. "I didn't mean to. Oh, but think! There's Harboys been rotting in prison these twenty years, remembering nothing of those few dreadful moments. To this day he doesn't know it he's innocent or guilty. Think of it."

Mrs. Park lifted her white face and twitching lips. One hand had stolen to the region of her heart. Each rapid stroke of her pulses seemed to shake her.

"Why have you come here?" she cried in a voice which rose high and querulous with a nameless dread. "You don't want the house! You never intended——"

"No," said Royds, "I came here to find out."

"What?"

"They say strange things happen in the library. I have heard stories. You tell me you have heard footfalls, voices, the sound of a shot. Don't you understand, woman? What happened in the library that evening twenty years ago is known only to God! The man who lives remembers nothing. If it be true that Peter Marsh returns. . . . Oh, don't you understand? It is the only way of learning . . . the only way. . . ."

Mrs. Park stood up; her slim body made a barrier between him and the door.

"I can't let you go to the library," she cried sharply.

"I must. I'm going to spend the night there. I'm going to wait until Peter—"

"I can't let you," she said again.

"But you must. Don't you understand? This means life or death to a man."

She backed almost to the door.

"It's madness!" she cried. "Nobody has ever endured that room after nightfall."

"I will!"

"I shall be sent away if it is found out."

"It won't be found out. I'll recompense you if it is. Here, I came prepared to pay for the privilege." He tugged a bundle of bank notes roughly out of his breast pocket and flung them on the table. "How much do you want? Five pounds? Ten? Twenty?"

Mrs. Park's gaze lingered on the roll of notes. She knew the value of money. Besides, she was alone in the great house with a man it might be dangerous to thwart.

"Come," said Royds, "here are five five-pound notes. Take them and act like a sensible woman. Then I shall go to the library, and you will make me a fire. Is there any furniture there?"

"No," muttered the woman, her gaze still on the roll of bank notes.

"Then, if you will permit me, I will take a chair."

He picked up the notes again and transferred all of them but five to his breast pocket. With these five he advanced and pressed them into the woman's hand. Her fingers closed over them.

"I'm doing wrong," she muttered.

"You're doing right. I'll get the truth to-night if I have to summon the devil himself. Now come and help me make a fire in the library."

She turned heavily away without a word and went to a cupboard, from the bottom of which she took a bundle of firewood and an old sheet of newspaper, which she dropped on top of the contents of the half-filled scuttle. Then she lit a candle in a brass stick and motioned him towards the door. He picked up a chair as he followed her.

The house was very still as they passed through the kitchen and passages leading to the hall. Their footfalls on the uncarpeted floors rang out sonorously through the hollow shell of the house.

To the woman this shattering of a silence which seemed almost sacred was a new weapon put into the hands of Terror. Her overstrained nerves cried out in protest at each of the man's heavy steps. Around her, in the shifting penumbra beyond reach of the candle light, above her in the empty upper chambers of the house, all manner of sleeping horrors, shapeless abominations of the night-world, seemed to waken and listen and draw near. The silent house seemed full of stealthy movement, and each blotch of darkness was an ambush peopled by the lewd phantasms of her mind. The man walking behind her seemed to be without nerves, or he had so stimulated them as to bring them entirely under his control.

Evidently he knew the house, for he passed her in the hall taking the lead in the procession of two, and went straight to the library door, which he flung open and passed on the crest of the following candle light.

The library was a long room in an angle of the house. A long row of windows fronted the hearth and two more faced the door. The walls were of oak panel stained a mahogany colour, but in that dim light they looked black, as if they were hung with funereal trappings.

The man lingered between the door and the first of the windows, while Mrs. Park, half-closing her eyes, hurried across to the fireplace with the scuttle. He seemed to be searching for something. Presently he found it.

"There's a hole in one of these panels," he announced.

Mrs. Park's heart gave a leap.

"Yes," she stammered. "It's a—a bullet hole. The shot lodged there after—after——"

"Yes," he said, quietly, "I understand." He crossed the room with the chair and set it down at that corner of the hearth which faced the door and the damaged panel. "And that afternoon, over twenty years ago, I was sitting here——"

There was a crash as the scuttle fell from the woman's hands. All her horror and amazement expressed itself in one thin, muffled scream.

"*You* were sitting there! *You*! Gerald Harboys! Gerald Harboys, the murderer!"

He answered quietly: "Gerald Harboys or Stephen Royds—God help me, what does it matter? Murderer or not—only God knows! But I shall learn to-night. Light that fire, woman, and leave me."

She left him, and stumbled blindly back to the little vulgar room behind the kitchen. But a fascination stronger than terror drew her back to the outside of the library door, there trembling to wait and to listen. . . .

Harboys, to give him his real name at the last, settled himself on the chair and at first busied himself with the building up of the fire. Then he took a revolver from his coat pocket, and placed it upon the mantelpiece within his reach. This done he looked out across the room with a steady gaze.

The firelight wrought strange patterns among the shadows, but in the swiftly changing measures of this shadow-dance he found nothing of what he sought. Presently he began to speak aloud, quietly but very distinctly, so that the shivering woman outside the door brought her hands to her tightening throat.

"Peter, Peter." The tone was almost wheedling. "Can you hear me? I'm sitting in just the same place that I was at that evening, with my bad leg resting on a stool. Here am I, and here's that damned revolver. Now, Peter, won't you come? They say you're always here—that you can't rest because your best friend shot you. Did I shoot you, Peter? My mind's a blank—a blank! For twenty years I have been trying to remember. I have not known peace day and night for twenty years, Peter. Oh, come and tell me! I want to know—to *know*. There's something wrong, Peter. I couldn't have done it. How could I have shot you, boy?"

He relapsed into silence, his gaze never leaving the space between the door and the first window. After a long minute his voice broke out again, choked and almost tearful.

"Is it because you hate me that you won't show yourself, Peter? Was I mad? And did I do it after all? Don't hate me, Peter. I've suffered! Have pity! One way or another I want to end this agony to-night. Oh, God, make him merciful to me! Peter, we'd been friends so long. School . . . don't you remember Wryvern, and those long talks under the lime-trees in the Close on summer nights? And study teas? And going up to Lords'?"

He babbled on, while kaleidoscopic pictures passed before the eyes of his memory. Cool, dewy morning, and the cricket eleven tumbling out of houses for fielding practice; rows of languid boys in dim classrooms and a scratching of pens; bright sunlight, and white shapes moving on a green sward; crowded touch-lines, and the scrum forming, and goal-posts standing up stark against a grey November sky. In each and all of them he caught a wavering, vanishing glimpse of Peter Marsh.

"Peter!" he cried out again. "Can't you hear me? Won't you come to me? You *do* come back. They all say so. That woman hears you. You—in your scarlet coat, as you came in that evening. I remember . . . when I saw you lying there . . . the blood scarcely showed. I was sitting here waiting for Muriel. I heard you both come up the drive. Muriel was laughing at something. You were both talking to the groom outside. Then I heard you in the hall, and Muriel ordered tea and went upstairs. And I thought: 'She doesn't come in to see me. I'm nothing to her now I'm crocked. It's all Peter, Peter, Peter. By God I' I said, 'I've been blind as well as lame. The things I've seen which they pretended were nothing . . . The things I haven't seen, but heard of in whispers and hints.' All in a moment my brain caught fire. 'Damn you!' I said, 'I'll teach you to make a cuckold of a lame man!' Then . . . you came in."

The trembling woman outside heard him utter a hoarse cry.

"Peter! Peter! Oh, God, I'm beginning to remember! You stood where you're standing now, touching the handle of the door. That's right! And you said—I remember now—'Give us a peg, Jerry. I'm frozen. There's a devil of an

east wind.' Peter! Peter! Don't look like that! I'm remembering . . . remembering. Oh, God, have mercy . . . have mercy!"

A hoarse scream echoed through the room, a chair reeled over with a crash, and then followed a frenzied shouting.

"I remember . . . I remember . . . damn you! when you turned your back on me . . . like that. . . ."

A shot rang out; then another. Then silence enfolded Nobody's House and its one living inmate, a swooning woman, who clung to the oak balustrade.

It was half an hour later when Mrs. Park forced herself into the library. The red glow of the fire was still dancing on the walls and floor. For a moment one ruddy gleam seemed to take a fantastic shape—like the profile figure of a man in hunting pink.

Harboys lay crumpled and face downwards across the hearth, the revolver still in his hand, the ugly wound in his temple mercifully hidden. To that end had he remembered.

Where there had been a bullet hole in one of the panels the police next morning found two. They were side by side and scarcely an inch apart.

THE BLACK DIAMOND TREE

I

THE kindly thought must have occurred to him when he was only a few yards behind me, for, although he pulled up very swiftly and smoothly, he was a few yards in front before the car, a new and expensive one, was still. He leaned out, smiled, and waited for me to draw level with him, and I knew that he was going to offer me a ride.

"You going Kerstham way?" he asked. "If so, I can give you a lift."

Kerstham was my intended destination, and the last milestone had told me it was four miles distant. I had been walking swiftly, swinging an attache case, with the air of a man who has a destination, and there was obviously nothing much between me and Kerstham.

I trotted up and had a foot on the running-board behind the already opened door, uttered my conventional words of thanks, and climbed in beside the Good Samaritan.

This Samaritan was a very young man; or seemed so, because we all regard men ten years younger than ourselves as very young. He might have been twenty-seven. He was tall and thin and pale, but there was nothing suggestive of weakness about his pallor. His features had that neatness of cut which Victorian ladies would have described as "aristocratic" and there was an air of restrained melancholy about him as if he had lately suffered a bereavement. But there were no signs of mourning about his light brown plus fours, topped by a collar and tie of almost the same shade.

"Not at all," he said pleasantly, in answer to my thanks. "I'm glad to have company. I hope you weren't walking for pleasure or exercise and were too polite to say so?"

"I hate walking," I assured him. "Motoring's cured all the affection I ever had for it. But this evening there was

nothing else to do. Car conked out just outside that hole of a village a mile back, and the garage people said they couldn't do anything until to-morrow. I suppose there's a decent hotel in Kerstham?"

"There are two or three of sorts, but I don't know what they're like. Glad if I've been able to be of use to you."

While he drove fairly fast with an assumed air of carelessness we tried to make conversation. I forget what we talked about, but it was the usual pleasant trivial stuff which passes between strangers compelled to pass a few minutes together. Suddenly, after a little lull in our talk, he turned to me and said very unexpectedly: "Unless you particularly want to go to an hotel, why not let me put you up for the night?"

Since I didn't know the man from Adam it was an embarrassing invitation. I began to stammer that I couldn't dream of imposing myself on him.

"You will be doing me a kindness," he said simply, as if he meant it. "I have very few visitors."

"And I've only some pyjamas and a toothbrush with me," I said.

"That's all you need. You'll see nobody but the servants and myself."

What could I say without affronting him? But I accepted against my better judgment. Why was this young man, attractive enough in his personality, obviously well born and well educated, seemingly friendless and living alone with a staff of servants? It wasn't in the ordinary nature of things. There was another pause, so I said briskly:

"Well, in the circumstances perhaps I had better introduce myself. My name's Digby."

"Mine's Harboys."

"Let me see," I said thoughtfully, "haven't I heard of a Sir Charles Harboys?"

"That's my name, but I expect you mean my father. He died two or three years ago."

Yes, it must have been the father of whom I had heard; but what I had heard of him was gone from my mind. Somehow though, I was aware that it was nothing pleasant.

We entered Kerstham, and Harboys turned to me and said: "Do you mind if we stop for a minute. I've got a call to make."

He pulled up before the old archway of the Chequers.

"Got a bill to pay," he explained. "I get my wines and spirits through the people here. I dare say you'd like a drink. If so, there's a comfortable smoke-room and I shall not keep you long."

I thought his suggestion a good one. And in the smoke-room there occurred one of those unexpected meetings which are for ever taking place in country hotels. There were two men in the room when I entered, both in flannels and evidently hot from tennis, and drinking beer with gusto out of plated tankards. One of them I used to know well, but I had not seen him for years.

"Hullo, Hencham!" I exclaimed. "Fancy seeing you here!"

"Not so odd, seeing that I live in this part of the world. But what are *you* doing?"

"Oh, I'm passing through. Car conked out, so I've got to spend the night here."

"What, here? In this hotel?"

"No, I'm staying with a man named Harboys."

Hencham looked startled.

"What, *that* fellow! Do you know him?"

"I haven't yet been to his place," I parried. "What sort of a house is it? Interesting?"

He uttered a little dry laugh.

"Interesting? Too damned interesting, I should think!"

Of course, I wanted to fish for information, but before I could say more than a word or two, Harboys was in the room. He and Hencham exchanged the briefest nods.

"I'm ready when you are," Harboys said to me, "but I don't want to hurry you."

That I could see was untrue. He did want to hurry me, and I could see it. Obviously he and Hencham were not friends. I hadn't even had the drink for which I came, but I went out with him at once and followed him into the car. Just then I would have given anything to get out of my night's engagement.

II

THE approach to Dendring Court was delightful. Harboys turned the car through the open gates beside a lodge into a long straight avenue of elm and oak, with part of the façade of the house visible at the end of the long vista.

The outside of the house was impressive but not particularly beautiful. It was old enough—early Jacobean, I should think, or perhaps even earlier—but too many subsequent owners had indulged their respective tastes in architecture. The gardens were beautifully kept.

I had expected to find the grounds a wilderness and the house a ruin. Hermits, however wealthy, generally prefer to surround themselves with squalor.

Nor could the neatest housewife, nor connoisseurs of old furniture, pictures and china, have uttered a word of reproach against the interior. My host took me straight to the gunroom.

"You'd better have that drink now," he said grinning. "I see you know Hencham?"

"Yes," I said.

"Ah," he remarked, "we're not very good friends."

A model butler appeared in answer to a bell lightly touched, and reappeared with a tray on which were glasses and a syphon. While I drank the whisky and soda Harboys had mixed for me I noticed on the mantelpiece the photograph of a girl. She was quite pretty, I thought, but in no way remarkable, and the photograph would have left no impression on my mind if I hadn't seen portraits of her in nearly all the downstairs rooms.

"Perhaps you'd like to see over the house?" Harboys suggested presently. "You may find it rather interesting. Dinner won't be for another hour."

Of course, I put myself in his hands, and it was on this tour of inspection that I noticed the several likenesses of the girl whose photograph I had seen in the gunroom. Had we here, I wondered, a romantic young idiot who, having been jilted, posed as being heart-broken, and was aping the romantics of an early school of fiction by living as a solitary?

That didn't account for Hencham's words and tone, nor would a man who had sent himself "to Coventry" seek the company of a stranger. Besides, Harboys' manner, although slightly melancholy, was not that of a man attempting to advertise a "secret sorrow". This was no House of Usher. It was a beautifully kept country home, obviously staffed by a number of efficient servants and—as it seemed to me—wasted on a young man who was mysteriously without friends.

All the while Harboys was fairly bright, pointing out to me

without any ill-bred airs of pride of possession this picture or that article of furniture. He was the normal host showing a guest over his house. At that time I saw nothing unusual or abnormal in him, and wondered the more.

I saw the first symptoms of his queerness—that is the word I prefer to use—when he took me around the gardens. The house faced east, and on the southern side were tennis courts, the grass beautifully kept but the standing nets rotting between their posts, witnesses that nobody came to play tennis with Harboys. The half acre of turf was flanked on one side by fruit trees. It was late August and large apples—I can never remember the names of the different sorts of apples—were hanging in thick clusters, ruddy or green, and seemed already ripe for picking.

But the first tree, as one crossed from the path under the wall of the house was a large old tree smothered with great plums of so deep a purple that they were almost black. They were already over-ripe, and a few belated wasps were still busy among the windfalls. The ground beneath was strewn with them, and one or two rustled and cracked their way through leaves and twigs and plopped on the ground as we approached.

"What wonderful plums," I remarked. "What are they called?"

"Black diamonds," Harboys answered, with an indifference which I afterwards knew to be studied. "I think," he added, with the air of one making a grim joke over the head of a child, "that they are aptly named."

One fell at my feet as he spoke, and I picked it up with the intention of robbing the wasps.

"May I?" I asked, beginning to pull at the skin.

A curious change came over him. He seemed half frightened, half angry, wholly vehement.

"For God's sake, no!" he cried. "Don't touch anything off that tree. Drop it! Drop it, I tell you! Don't even touch it."

I did as he asked. With an effort he seemed to pull himself together.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You'll think I'm frightfully odd. But I'd rather you didn't touch any of those plums. They're—well, I don't consider them good to eat. You can have a barrow-load of the fruit if you like, but not those."

I dropped the offending plum and tried not to look too surprised. Harboys tried to smile apologetically.

"I ought to have that infernal tree down," he muttered. "I'm always meaning to. But I daren't. I wonder what would happen if I did. I wonder what the old devil would do to me if I did."

III

As a man who is fond of food, and knows good food when he meets it, I must say that it was an admirable dinner. We were perfectly waited on by the ideal butler and a footman with the profile of a knave of spades and the manners of an acolyte. When we were left alone with the port Harboys pushed over a box of cigarettes.

"Well," he said, eyeing me with a kind of sly, self-deprecatory humour, "why do you think I'm doing this—living here all by myself, with all the people of my own kind living around me hating me like an adder."

"I didn't know——" I began awkwardly.

"Oh, but you guessed. You know Hencham, and you saw a bit of it to-night. He'll tell you all about me if you go and see him to-morrow. I don't want to embarrass you, but you may as well hear my story first. If it won't bore you——"

"Carry on," I said.

"Well, in the first place there was a pretty useful scandal about me, which I didn't deserve. In the second place I'm mad."

I took a sip at my port without, I hope, too evident an air of nervousness.

"It's all right," he laughed. "I'm not violent, and if I were you could cope with me. And I can assure you that my insanity doesn't take a form which is unpleasant to anybody but myself. Forgive my egotism. I meet so few people that I can talk to. May I tell you all about it or will it bore you stiff?"

"It certainly won't bore me," I promised.

"Thanks. Then I'll put it into very few words. You seem to have heard of my father—or me—for I was cursed with his name. He was a popular man, hard-riding, hospitable, absurdly generous on public platforms, and loved by everybody who hadn't too much to do with him. In his own home

and among his servants he was an unspeakable brute. He bullied my mother to death—sneered her to death. He hated me for not being like himself. He wanted for a son something brutal and brainless, the vicious, old-fashioned squire. By some freak of nature he begot something that grew up sensitive and, I suppose, scholarly. In return I hated him like hell.”

“The people around here will tell you about two inquests, if you trouble to ask. The first they’ll hardly remember much about. It was kept decently quiet. That was on old Stacks, our butler, who had been in the family service for forty years. He was expected to be pensioned off. In one of his charming fits of temper my father suddenly sacked him. We all loved old Stacks. Too old to get another job, and too proud to blackmail my father by airing his grievance, the poor old man committed suicide.

“It was a nice, quiet, friendly sort of inquest. The coroner happened to be my father’s lawyer, and he sat without a jury. No awkward questions were asked. Verdict—Suicide While of Unsound Mind.

“That finished me with my father. We had the devil’s own row. He loved power, and he’d brought me up to be entirely dependent on him. I have no profession, and he could have made me a pauper. There is no entail on the property and he could have disinherited me, but he thought of a richer revenge than that. A few months later, believing himself to be suffering from an incurable disease, he followed the example of old Stacks.

“But this time there was no hushed-up inquest. My father had written a letter to the coroner, explaining that he had taken this step because of my ingratitude and the general wickedness of my life. I had to go into the witness-box, and I didn’t cut up at all well. The medical evidence revealed to me that my father was a hypochondriac, and convinced the coroner and jury that I was a liar, besides being a scoundrel and an ungrateful son. My father was popular in the county, remember, and I, not much more than a boy, who had not my father’s gift for making friends, publicly branded as his moral murderer and a man to be shunned by decent people.”

“I should have thought,” I said, “that you could have lived that down.”

“Yes,” he agreed moodily, “I suppose I might have lived

it down, but for one other circumstance. One person stuck to me, in the teeth of her parent's wishes, and that was the girl to whom I was engaged. I have several photographs of her about the place. Perhaps you have noticed . . . ?"

I nodded.

"Are you still engaged ?" I ventured to ask.

"No, I broke it off. When I discovered that I had gone mad what else could I do ? Unfortunately I told the facts to Rosa's people—who didn't love me much. Very soon the countryside heard that I had jilted Rosa and owned to being off my head. That put the complete tin hat on me. People can tolerate a pretty bad hat, but not a bad hat who is also a lunatic. That's why you find me living like this. Nobody of my own set, except one or two friends who live at a distance, dreams of coming near me. Well, that's my story. Imagine how glad I am of your company if only for one evening."

"It's pretty tragic," I agreed. "Why don't you clear out ? Travel. Do anything."

"I can't. Under the terms of the will I have to be in residence for eleven months in the year, else the estate passes to a cousin. My father had thought of all that. I have no profession, and if I chucked it I should be a beggar. Besides, any man with any backbone ought to stay on and fight the whole thing out."

"I wish I could help you," I said. "It is rather odd that you should tell me you are mad. Most people who are really mad don't know it."

"Then I can assure you," he answered dryly, "that I am one of the exceptions."

"If you really are," I said, "I think I can tell you what form it takes. Persecution mania. You think the whole world's against you."

"In other words I am deluded about all I have just told you ?"

"A good part of it, perhaps."

He shook his head and laughed rather sadly.

"I only wish you were right. I suffer from delusions of another sort. I don't want to discuss them, though."

"Anything to do with plums ?" I asked slowly.

"Good heavens, no ! Oh, I see what you're getting at. Well something perhaps to do with that tree of black diamonds."

IV

I WAS sorry for Harboys, but in no way nervous of him. When at last I went to bed I could not guess that I was about to pass the most wretched night of my life. My room was large, airy and comfortable, with two tall double windows in the wall facing my bed.

I don't know what time it was when I woke. I should think it must have been about two in the morning.

I woke up wondering where I was, as one is apt to wonder in a strange room. Then I remembered, and as I remembered I was conscious of a face bending down close over mine. It was a man's face, clean-shaven, elderly, indescribably evil and menacing, and round as the moon. It was the roundest face I ever saw. And it was yellowish and slightly luminous like the moon seen through a thin cloud. The lips were moving as if in speech, but I heard nothing.

I have no intention of trying to describe the excess of terror which froze my soul inside my body. I tried frenziedly to push the thing away from me, but there was nothing tangible about it. After a moment or two it went of its own volition.

There was no body attached to it. It floated, hobbing slightly like a child's toy balloon, and fronted me once more across the foot of my bed. Once more those dreadful lips moved, and although there was silence in the room save for the thumping of my own heart, I had not the least doubt of what they were saying. The words were conveyed to my consciousness by some medium other than my ears.

"Go and look down at the plum tree. Go and look down at the plum tree."

I lay stiff as a board and dripping with sweat, but the Face seemed to know that I had understood, for presently it faded like a slowly expiring flame.

Whole minutes must have passed before I could move. I knew what I had to do. I knew which plum tree was meant. My windows overlooked the tennis courts and the black diamond tree. I did not know what horror awaited my gaze down below, but I had to get up and look, else, I was sure, that other Horror would return and reiterate its command.

I blundered somehow across the floor, and looked out and down.

My windows were open and there was plenty of light from the stars. Through the still night air I could hear quite clearly the creaking of one of the old plum-tree's branches. There was good cause for that creaking, for something dangled from that heavy lower limb . . . a foot or two of rope, and the shape of a man swinging gently by the neck. Well, I had seen what I was told to see . . .

I dressed and paced the room for the remainder of the time of darkness, and with both the burners of electric light turned on. I shan't easily forget the slow passing of those small hours, nor how long it seemed to take the creeping dawn to grow to full daylight. I went down and out in the garden as soon as the sun was up—but not in that same garden in which the plum tree stood. After some while Harboys heard me stirring and came down to join me. The sight of my face brought him to a halt, and he uttered an involuntary ejaculation of dismay.

"You don't look well," he said. "Is anything the matter?"

"I've had a most damnable nightmare or—or something," I said, "I thought I woke up, and there was a most filthy face bending over me, a dirty yellowish face——"

"My God!" exclaimed Harboys, and his own face sprang alight with amazement and, strangely enough, something like hope. "Nothing but a face?" he cried.

"Nothing but a face and very round and indescribably evil."

Harboys began to tremble all over with excitement.

"I know what happened then. I know what happened. He made you go and look at the plum tree. Yes, and you needn't tell me what you saw. It's all true, then! Thank heaven it's all true. I didn't believe before. I couldn't believe. The Face you saw was my father's. The thing you saw hanging was Stacks, the butler. They both hanged themselves from that same tree. Oh, man, man, you don't know what you've done for me."

And he came to me laughing hysterically and wrung both my hands.

"You seem pretty pleased about my having had a perfectly vile experience," I said not very graciously.

"What of me? I see them every night."

"I understand. And you brought me in to share the treat?"

"You don't understand!" he cried. "Man, man, they're real. Others besides me can see them. Something can be done . . . exorcism . . . something . . ."

"I should get it done, then," I said briefly, "and pretty quick."

He put his hands on my shoulders, his eyes shining.

"Oh, I'm sorry for your sake that I knowingly afflicted that foul time on you. But for my own sake I can't help being glad. I'll try to make it up to you in some way. Think what it means to me. I can go back to Rosa. I'm not mad after all."

F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

The Strange Case of Mr. Todmorden

THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. TODMORDEN

MR. TODMORDEN rose from his seat in the railway carriage; he spoke in the tones of a man who ends a discussion: "Well, gentlemen, this is my station, and you haven't convinced me that a man ever commits a crime unless of his own free-will. I'd show no mercy to the rascal! Good-night!"

Mr. Todmorden was far from being so stern, either in appearance or character, as this emphatically uttered sentiment would suggest. As his short, stout figure moved along the platform, the head thrown back and a pair of bright little eyes, set in a chubby round face, glancing sharply through his spectacles for an acquaintance to smile at, he looked—what in fact, he was—a successful city man whose original kindness of heart had mellowed into habitual benevolence—the type of man who moves through life beaming on people who touch their caps.

Affable though Mr. Todmorden was, he had his prejudices and his pride; pride centred in the practice he had built up as a family solicitor of standing and renown; prejudices directed against those unfortunates who, from choice or necessity, transgressed the social code. His ideal in life was probity. He was intolerant of any infraction of it, and conducted his own affairs with punctilious scrupulousness.

In the warm light of a late summer sunset, he strolled along the suburban streets to his home. His countenance expressed that contentment with himself and his surroundings usual with him. His mind, satisfied, played lightly over the headings of sundry affairs, neatly docketed and done with, he had settled that day. Other affairs, not so completed, were thrust into the background until the morrow. His good-humoured round face was in readiness for a smile.

Suddenly he stopped and contemplated through his spectacles a large house a little way back from the road. A long

ladder resting against the wall was the uncommon object that had attracted his attention.

"Dear me!" he said to himself, "old Miss Hartley having the house painted again!"

Miss Hartley was one of his oldest and most valued clients. In fact, both repudiated the business term and called each other "friends". Their sentiments towards each other warranted it. She was an elderly spinster, eccentric and wealthy; he a bachelor who could and did afford himself a whim. They smiled at one another's oddities without any lessening of the mutual respect many years of intercourse had induced. His attitude towards the old lady was almost fraternal.

The long practice of watching her interests had developed a habit of affectionate protection in him. He advised her on countless petty matters and forgot to put them in the bill.

The sight of the ladder against the wall recalled one of his most common anxieties. It was a pet grievance of his that she would persist in living alone, save for one maid, in that large house. To his mind, she offered herself as a prey to the malefactor who should chance to correlate the two facts of her wealth and her solitude. He expressed that opinion frequently, and was obstinately smiled at. Now, as he walked on, the thought of the danger she invited recurred to him. It irritated him.

"Tut! tut!" he said. "That ladder, now is just placed right for a burglar! I'm sure it is! Dear me! how careless! how very careless!" He tried to measure the ladder from his remembrance of it, and, to end his doubts, returned and examined it again. The ladder rested close to a freshly painted window-sill on the first floor.

"Dear me! dear me!" said Mr. Todmorden, genuinely perturbed. "That's the window of Miss Hartley's room!" He stood irresolute, debating whether he should ring the bell, and point out the dangerous position of the ladder. A nervous fear of the old lady's smile restrained him. He knew she regarded him as an old "fusser".

He walked on again, carrying his fears.

"She is really too foolish, too foolish!" he repeated. "Living alone there — with only that stupid girl in the house! Anyone might break in. They've only to walk up that ladder! And she will persist in advertising that she has valuables!"

The occasion of the final clause in Mr. Todmorden's mental

arraignment was a particularly fine diamond brooch the old lady wore at all times, despite his protests. If there was a sentimental reason for its continual use, she concealed it under her quiet smile. The memory of that smile irritated Mr. Todmorden. "Confound her! she's so obstinate!" His thoughts focused themselves on that brooch, with a criminal lurking in the background.

As his irritation faded under the soft warm light of the sunset, he amused himself by picturing types of possible burglars. Finally, forgetting his original preoccupations, he thought of an ancestor of his own—his maternal grandfather—who had been transported for a doubtful case of murder. In contrast to that squalid page of family history, self-esteem read over his own achievements. Successful, respected, an alderman, a possible knighthood in front, he had surely wiped out that black patch on his pedigree.

He ate his solitary dinner, and revived the feeling of well-being with a bottle of his favourite port. Then Miss Hartley's brooch recurred to his mind, and was followed by a thought of the ladder which led to it, and of a criminal who might climb the ladder.

As he sat in his big chair in the lovely dining-room, gazing at passing thoughts rather than thinking them, the case of his maternal grandfather cropped up in his reverie. Moved by a sudden whim, he rose from his chair and took down a battered volume of law reports. Fortified by another glass, he read through the case of his ancestor. He finished it and sat thoughtful for a moment, before replacing the book. "H'm, h'm," he said to himself. "Very doubtful! Very doubtful! Ah, well, we've travelled a long road since then!" He smiled at his own success, and went off to bed in a contented mood.

In the morning, as he walked down to the station to catch his usual train, he noticed a group of people standing on the pavement and gazing up at a house. An unreasoning anxiety gripped him. He hastened his pace. Yes—surely!—it was Miss Hartley's house which excited this unwonted interest. He arrived among the crowd, rather out of breath.

"What is it? What is it, my man?" he demanded of a gazing spectator.

Half a dozen voices replied.

"It's a murder! Old Miss Hartley—"

Mr. Todmorden did not wait to hear more.

"Good gracious!" he said, as he hurried along the garden path, and "Good gracious!" he repeated, as he rang the bell. He could not formulate a thought. He gazed, mentally, at the awful thing, stunned.

The door was opened by a policeman. Behind him stood the maidservant, white, frightened and sobbing. She ran towards him with a cry of "Oh, sir!" but broke down.

"All right, all right, Helen," said Mr. Todmorden, rather brusquely, pushing her aside. He addressed himself to the policeman. "What has happened, constable? Surely not murder?"

"Yes, sir; I'm afraid so." He looked doubtfully at his questioner. "Are you one of the old lady's relatives, sir?"

"No; I'm her solicitor, and one of her oldest friends. Dear me! dear me! how terrible! Is there anyone in authority here, constable?"

"Two inspectors upstairs, sir."

"Can I see them?"

He was shown into the bedroom, and introduced himself to the police officers. They welcomed him with gravity. On the bed lay a covered figure. Mr. Todmorden drew aside the sheet and gazed upon the features of his old friend. They were marred by a bullet-hole through the forehead. He turned away, trembling, his face working with emotion. He could scarcely speak, but made the effort due to his dignity as the deceased's legal adviser. "Any — any clue?" he asked.

"None, sir, at present," was the reply.

"Dear me! how terrible! how very terrible! She was my oldest friend"—he could not find the strength to repress his grief—"my oldest friend! Oh, it's awful, inspector, awful! The—the wickedness of it! She hadn't an enemy." He struggled for the control of himself. "What was it—robbery?"

"No, sir, nothing seems to have tampered with. Perhaps the murderer was startled."

"When was it discovered?"

"This morning, when the maid brought in the tea. She says she heard nothing!"

"And there is nothing missing?"

"Apparently not, sir. The drawers were locked, and the keys have not been interfered with. Nothing was disturbed in fact."

"Ah!" Mr. Todmorden was gradually getting back into his legal clearness of mind. "Has the girl looked carefully round to see if anything has disappeared?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Call her up, if you please, officer."

Ellen appeared, still weeping, and was bidden to look round for anything out of place. Dabbing her eyes she examined the room carefully. Suddenly she gave a cry.

"The mistress's diamond brooch! I put it here last night!" She pointed to a tray on the dressing-table. "It's gone!"

"Good God!" said Mr. Todmorden. "How very curious!"

The inspectors looked at him sharply.

"Does that give you any clue, sir?" asked one of them.

"No—no," he replied, rather confused. "I—the fact is, I was thinking of that brooch only last night, and of how unprotected Miss Hartley was. I have often told her so—poor woman!"

"Ah!" said the inspectors in chorus. Mr. Todmorden felt there was something suspicious in their sharply uttered exclamation. Even to himself his explanation had sounded lame. The police-officers might imagine he was shielding somebody.

"Of course," he said, "the murderer must have come in by the ladder."

"The ladder?" asked one of the inspectors. "I saw no ladder."

"There was certainly a ladder resting against the sill of this window at six o'clock last night," asserted Mr. Todmorden. "The house, you will observe, is being redecorated. I noticed the ladder, and it occurred to me that a first-class opportunity was being offered to a burglar. In fact, I was on the point of calling on Miss Hartley and warning her of it. I wish I had done so!"

"H'm!" The inspector scarcely dignified to trifle with the suggestion. It could be understood that it was his professional prerogative to evolve theories. "Yes—perhaps. But I think we can explain the entrance in a more likely way," he said mysteriously. "It is scarcely probable that the decorator's men would leave the ladder there all night, sir."

"I'm sure the rascal came up the ladder!" Mr. Todmorden's affirmation was so vehement, came so involuntarily, that it surprised himself.

Why was he so positive? He felt uncomfortable. He put on a bustling, important air. "Well, well, I must get up to town, as I have a very important appointment. I will look in at the station on my way home this evening. If you hear of anything during the day you might communicate with me."

The old gentleman took his way to the City, oppressed by grief.

As good as his word, he called at the police-station on his way home. The chief inspector received him :

"A very mysterious affair, Mr. Todmorden."

"It is a very terrible blow to me," replied the old gentleman. "Miss Hartley was a very old friend. I feel myself in some way responsible. The possibility of such a tragedy actually occurred to me on my way home last night, and I might have warned her of it. I shall never forgive myself."

"You refer to the ladder," said the inspector. "We have made inquiries about that. It appears it was overlooked last night and was carried away by one of the decorator's men at six o'clock this morning. Undoubtedly, the murderer used it. In fact, he left the window open after him."

"I was certain of it," said Mr. Todmorden. "And there is no clue to the rascal?"

"Hardly any. The constable on the beat reports that, at two o'clock this morning, he saw the figure of a man running along the road away from the house. That man was wearing a very light suit—possibly a flannel one. A curious dress for a burglar, I think you will admit. The constable particularly noticed that there was no sound of footsteps as the man ran. He must have been wearing rubber soles. Unfortunately, the constable lost sight of him when he turned the corner."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Todmorden. Only half his mind had listened to the inspector's words; the other half was occupied by that curious and fairly common hallucination of a previous and identical incident. The description was oddly familiar. He seemed to know it in advance. At an intense moment of the hallucination, he had glimpsed a memory of himself running, running along the road at the dead of night, running silently.

The inspector was observing him narrowly.

"I suppose you cannot give us any hint that might help us,

Mr. Todmorden? You know no one who bore the old lady a grudge?"

"Certainly not. She was the best and kindest of women."

"May I ask who benefits by her death?"

"She has only one relative, a nephew, who inherits everything. He is in America. I have cabled to him, and received a reply."

"This business of the brooch, Mr. Todmorden—it seems strange that the murderer should have taken that, and that only. He made no attempt on anything else. You know no one who had an interest in the article?"

"No one. Miss Hartley wore it always. I have often expostulated with her for wearing so valuable a piece of jewellery in the street."

"Yes, yes, of course. A very strange affair, Mr. Todmorden, very strange! I confess I cannot see light in it. Er—her affairs are quite in order, of course?"

"Quite. I keep the accounts; they are open to investigation. The name of Todmorden and Baines is a sufficient guarantee, I think," he added, with a smile. "But, of course, it is natural you should wish to make sure. You can examine the books to-morrow."

"Unnecessary, my dear sir, I'm quite certain. Of course, I am bound to ask these unpleasant questions."

"Don't apologize. I am as anxious as you are to catch the criminal. I have, in fact, a personal interest in it. Miss Hartley was so good a friend to me that I shall never rest until I have brought the scoundrel to justice. A reward may help. I will personally give a hundred pounds for his apprehension."

"Thank you, Mr. Todmorden. I hope we shall be able to claim it, though, at present, I see little chance of it."

As Mr. Todmorden went home, he looked years older than the man who had traversed the same ground twenty-four hours earlier. Grief-stricken though he was, at the loss of his dear friend, his predominant emotion was a fierce lust for vengeance on the murderer. His fingers worked, gripped the air, as he brooded on him—the hated unknown—and his step oscillated from fast to slow and slow to fast.

A black and bitter wrath seethed in him. It was, unjustifiably, the more bitter at the remembrance that Fate had placed for a moment in his hand the power to avert the tragedy, had

given him a glimpse into the future—and yet had turned aside his will. The wickedness of it! The dear, kind, charitable old soul! Shot like a dog!

"I'll double that reward if he isn't caught within a week!" he decided.

All through his solitary dinner he brooded on the crime, and sat afterwards, for long hours, trying to think of someone who might have an urgent reason for possessing himself of that diamond brooch. He went to bed at last, baffled, weary, heartsick.

Putting on his pyjamas, he noticed something unusual—something hard—in the pocket. Mechanically he drew out the object and looked at it. He stood as if petrified, his eyes staring, sweat breaking out on his brow.

In his hand he held Miss Hartley's diamond brooch!

He gazed at it, overwhelmed with amazement and horror. What was happening? Was he crazed? Was his mind unhinged by the event of the morning, was this an hallucination? All that was his familiar self prayed, prayed hard, that this might be madness. Or—his instinct of self-preservation caused him to clutch at the thought, was he the victim of some atrocious trick? Impossible.

"My God!" said Mr. Todmorden, sinking into a chair. The familiar concrete surroundings crumbled about him were dissipated. He gazed into unfathomable mysteries.

How could the brooch have got into his pocket? Someone must have put it there! Someone! Who? Who could have come into his bedroom and put that damnatory brooch into the pocket of his pyjamas? The servants? He reviewed them swiftly. Impossible! Then who? Not—surely not—he must be going mad—not himself? It was absurd, unthinkable. He had gone to bed and slept without a dream. Or, was there a dream—a dream of running in the darkness, fast, barefoot? Nonsense! Nonsense! He did not get up in the middle of the night, walk down the street, murder his dearest friend, and come back as though nothing had happened!

His mind flashed on the portrait of Miss Hartley, and he felt the cruel irony of the supposition, though he himself made it. Then who—who? A wave of superstition swept over him. Devils? It was inexplicable. He revolted at something obscure within him, something which pointed a finger to the

accusing brooch, which whispered the inexorable corollary in his ear. No! No! It could not be! He was innocent.

But was he?

The something whispered persistently. An idea came to him—the proof. He went quickly across to a drawer in his dressing-table and took out his revolver. With trembling hands he examined the charges. One had been exploded! Had devils fired his revolver also? Oh, God! He thought he was going to faint.

Madness? Madness came in these sudden attacks, so an imp of thought assured him. He was mad! Mad!

For hours he strode up and down the room, wrestling with demons in the night. He had killed his dearest friend. He had no doubt of it; the realization filled him with an agony of horror and grief. He would gladly have died rather than have done this awful thing. And how had he done it? How had he committed this crime without the faintest remembrance of it?

At length, physically exhausted, he threw himself on the bed and continued the struggle—striving, striving to see light in this appalling mystery. At last, he fell asleep.

He woke and looked around him. He was in a dark room. That was strange. He knew he had left the light on. He was standing up. He held something in his hand—a book. Puzzled, he put out his hand to where the switch of the electric light should be. It was not there. In a new terror that surged up, obliterating the older horrors of the night, he groped along the wall for the switch, and found it. The place sprang into light. He was in the dining-room! In his hand he held the report of his grandfather's trial. The truth flashed on him.

He was a somnambulist!

With a wild cry he sank down in a swoon.

When he returned to consciousness the electric lamps were yellow patches in the sunlight which filled the room. He struggled to his feet and switched them off. He stood for some moments unsteadily, trying to adjust his mind to these unfamiliar surroundings, to remember—to remember, something. Then his ghastly situation rushed on his mind vivid with a new light. He was a criminal! He asked discovery, ruin! He heard people moving about—servants. They must not suspect him of any abnormality. Haggard, tremb-

ling, giddy, an old, old man, he tottered up the stairs to his own bedroom.

Escape—escape from the consequences of his involuntary crime was his master impulse. He was no longer the benevolent Mr. Todmorden, successful, respected, the eminent solicitor; he was a hunted criminal, happed by Furies. He must not be found out. He sobbed in self-pity and strove for the control of his faculties. He must think—must think. The brooch must be got rid of. He would drop it over London Bridge. Yes, that was the way. The brooch gone, beyond all possibility of recovery, who would suspect him?

But suppose there was some trace of the crime on him? He must make sure. The inspector's story of the light-suited fugitive came into his mind—his pyjamas! That fugitive must have been himself in his pyjamas. He had again that flashed memory of running, running silently. He doubted no longer, but examined the pyjamas on his body, searching for a spot of blood, for any sign that might betray him. Yes! There on the trouser-leg was a smear of stone-coloured paint—the paint on Miss Hartley's window-sill.

He must get those pyjamas away, destroy them—somehow. He thought of half a dozen plans and rejected all. Everything he thought of seemed to proclaim his guilt. The problem was still unsolved when another danger occurred to him. His revolver contained a discharged cartridge. He must reload it. Feverishly he did so. As he clicked the chambers into place there was a knock at the door. He put down the revolver and listened in sudden panic. The knock was repeated. He tried to speak and could not. At last words came:

"What is it?"

"Please, sir, a man from the police-station wants to speak to you at once."

He tried hard to reply in his normal tones.

"All right. Tell him I'll be down presently."

"Please, sir, he says he can't wait."

Discovery? No! Impossible—as yet! He kept a tremor out of his voice by an effort.

"Show him into my dressing-room."

Mr. Todmorden thought swirly for a vivid second. That

smear of paint must be concealed. He slipped on a dressing-gown. Then he caught sight of his revolver on the table, and, on a blind impulse, dropped it into his pocket. He took a long breath. Now—was there anything about him suspicious? He opened his dressing-gown and surveyed himself in the mirror. Yes!—there was a button gone from his pyjama jacket! Where had he lost that button! He would have given anything for certainty. But he must not keep the police waiting. That would look strange. He girdled his gown about him and went into the dressing-room.

The chief inspector awaited him. A sharp expression of surprise came into the officer's face.

"I have had a bad night, inspector," said the old gentleman, noticing the look and feeling his haggard appearance needed explanation.

The inspector consoled with him.

"I am pleased to say we have found a slight clue to the criminal, Mr. Todmorden," he said, looking again sharply at the old gentleman. Mr. Todmorden felt he quailed under the glance. "It's a button. And, the curious thing is, it is a pyjama button."

"Yes?" Mr. Todmorden's mouth went dry.

"Funny wear for a burglar—pyjamas," commented the inspector.

"Very curious," Mr. Todmorden recognized the urgent necessity for a normal voice. "Yes; very curious." He must talk—say something! "By the way, inspector, I've been thinking about that reward. I've decided to triple it."

"Very kind of you, sir. I hope we shall ask you for the cheque. We're on the road, anyway. We've only got to find out where those pyjamas came from, and, quite likely, we shall get on his track."

"Yes, yes, quite so." Would the interview never end? Mr. Todmorden agonized.

"If we can only find some buttons like this, we can make a start. There are differences even in pyjama buttons, you know, sir. I have compared it with mine, but it doesn't tally. Would you mind comparing it with yours?"

Mr. Todmorden stared at him, speechless.

"Would you mind comparing it with yours, sir? We must not neglect any chance of getting a clue. Allow me!"

He stepped quickly to the old gentleman and flung aside

his dressing-gown. The buttons, with the hanging thread of their missing fellow, were revealed. Triumph flashed in the inspector's face.

"James Henry Todmorden, I——"

Mr. Todmorden jumped back from his grasp. With a sharp cry he drew his hand swiftly from his pocket. There was a report, and he dropped to the floor.

The inspector looked at his lifeless body.

"I thought the old rascal did it," he said. "A well-planned bit of work, though."

MARTIN ARMSTRONG

Mary . Russell

MARY ANSELL

MARY BRAKEFIELD, wife of Samuel Brakefield, landlord of the Golden Lion, Netherhinton, made her way along the accustomed hedge-bordered road that led to the foot of the downs. From the road end the coarse grass of the downs rose in a single abrupt slope to the flat summit, which was enclosed by a great rampart rising nobly from its broad ditch.

The face of this ancient earthwork was so steep that he who climbed it could do so only on his knees, pulling himself up with his hands by the strong tufted grass that clothed it like a shaggy fur. Every Thursday Mary Brakefield took the same walk, and always alone. She was a quiet, kindly, respectable woman, not otherwise eccentric, and her husband and the neighbours, though they themselves never took a walk except when some definite object required, had long since grown so accustomed to this weekly stroll of hers that they had ceased to regard it as strange, even when the weather was so stormy that it was incredible that anyone should walk out, much less climb the bare downs, for mere pleasure.

On winter evenings, when, looking from their cottage windows into a stormy twilight, the villagers saw a lonely figure struggling against the wind and rain down the long village street, they would say without surprise: "It'll only be Mrs. Brakefield coming back from her walk."

She was a spare, neat woman of forty, though strangers put her age down at over fifty. Her face was pale and bony; the eyes, too, were pale and weary and red-rimmed; and the corners of her mouth had a bitter downward droop that on rare occasions vanished suddenly and surprisingly into a charming, wistful smile.

It was the beginning of October, and the hedges between which she walked had kindled from the dusty green of summer into long lines of scarlet and yellow flame that danced and

flickered against the sagging grey sky in the breeze that flowed through them. All her life she had known that road, and the downs that rose at the end of it, and, beyond them, the wide plains of the sea into which the downs dropped—a sheer fall of eight hundred feet—in scooped precipices of white or rosy chalk.

For she was a native of Netherhinton and had never been further east of it than Bournemouth, further west than Sidmouth, or further north than Dorchester. She came of poor parents. Her father had been a farm labourer and her mother the daughter of a labourer, and it had been thought a great piece of luck for her to marry the landlord of the Golden Lion.

She walked on at a brisk pace, looking neither to right nor left nor even ahead of her : she walked, indeed, not at all as if walking for the mere sake of it, but as one on an errand, and when she reached the end of the road she began at once, without a pause or a glance about her, to climb the down by a sheep track that wavered steeply up it.

Under the stress of the climb her pace became gradually slower and slower ; half way up she paused, breathless, and turned to survey with unseeing eyes the variegated fields below her and, beyond them, the village thatches crouching under the yellowing elms and the gaunt grey fragment of Evesdon Castle, which Cromwell had blown up.

As soon as she had breath enough, she continued her climb, and then, when she was almost at the top and had reached the earthwork, vanished along the long line of the ditch and in half a minute reappeared, clambering on her hands and knees up the steep rampart. Soon she had crawled to the top, and stood for a moment silhouetted against the sky, a minute vertical object breaking the long horizontal lines of down and earthworks. Then again she disappeared.

The grassy area inside the rampart sloped slightly upwards to the sheer edge, so that from where she stood she saw nothing of the sea, but only the grey, laden sky. But she did not want to see the sea, for she knew that to-day it would be—not as it had been eighteen years ago to-day, blue and lustrous as an iris-petal and, near the shore, paler and so clear that the ribs of chalky rock at the bottom were as visible as if seen through a flawless, pale blue crystal—but leaden-grey, desolate chilling to the heart.

So she did not go towards the cliff-edge, but followed the base of the rampart until it bent inwards at right-angles and crossed the hilltop. There she stopped, and in the bend, as if in the corner of a roofless room, sat down. For a while she sat motionless, self-absorbed; then leaned back against the slope of the turf wall, turned on her left side, and closed her eyes.

And soon she knew that he was there, the Jim Ansell of eighteen years ago. She felt no human touch, no warmth, and his voice had no sound, but he was present to her and she could speak to him, not with her lips, not aloud—for there was no need to speak aloud—but in her heart, with a speech much more real, much more close, than the cold, audible speech she exchanged with her husband and neighbours and the tourists that came to the inn.

And in that unworldly, spiritual speech he answered her. With her eyes and all her senses closed and his visible absence shut out and forgotten, she lay in his arms, felt her body wrapped, safe and sound, in his body, the warmth of his face against hers, the smell, like heather and seaweed, of his khaki jacket. She was alive once more, escaped from the death of her present existence into the warm life of her early days. That life was so real to her that whenever she reached their meeting-place and lay back and closed her eyes, her actual self ceased to exist, and she had never once thought it strange that a tired, faded woman of forty should lie in the arms of this dark-haired young man of twenty-two, nor had she ever told herself that their child, if it had lived, would by now have been a boy only five years younger than his father, or that, just as there was another Mary, the faded Mary of to-day, so there was another Jim Ansell, withered and eyeless, lying in some unknown cemetery in France.

Such thoughts never came to her, for he and she met in a timeless and unchanging world which belonged to them alone. This angle in the earthwork was especially theirs, but they met in other places too, for she carried their secret world within her and could drop back into it whenever opportunity occurred. When she was alone at the inn, working in the kitchen or sitting, darning, in the little private parlour, she would often leave her patient body to get on with its work and would step across the threshold; and at night, the moment the candle had been blown out and she had laid

down in bed with Sam, she would be gone, abandoning to her husband the tired, obedient Mary Brakefield like a corpse laid out, hurrying back to her real life and Jim.

But sometimes, when she was very tired, she had not the strength to escape. The outer world—Sam Brakefield, the inn, the neighbours—was too strong for her. She was too feeble, by herself, to support and preserve the world of her desires. If only there had been someone else who knew of it and recognized its reality, who would speak of Jim, who would, perhaps, call her, not Mrs. Brakefield, but Mrs. Ansell, what a help and what a comfort it would be.

But there was no one: her secret was unshared. That name, Mary Ansell, which she had never borne in real life, was the name by which she thought of herself. She had actually written it in the few books which Jim's mother had left her at her death fourteen years ago. It was safe to do so, for Mary Ansell was the name of Jim's mother, and if Sam had ever noticed it he would not have been surprised.

Mrs. Ansell had left her not only the books, but also Jim's scroll, neatly framed—the scroll that had been sent to her after he had been killed. But Sam, as far as Mary knew, had never looked into the books. He had shown no surprise when they and the scroll had been brought to his wife, for he had known that she and Mrs. Ansell were old friends. When she had opened the parcel he had lifted up the scroll and examined it. "It'll look nice on the wall," he had said, and had then asked: "Who was he?"

"Her son," Mary had answered, and she had put away the books in the hanging bookcase in the parlour and hung up the scroll there. Sam never sat in that room. In the summer, on those days when so many visitors called that there was no more space in the public room, some of them were served there, but for nine months in the year Mary had it to herself, and she would sit there often to sew and darn.

Seated there near the books he must often have read, and with his scroll before her eyes, she felt closer to him than anywhere else but in the earthwork. She often glanced at his name at the bottom of the scroll—Lance-corporal James Ansell—but she seldom read what went before it, for the last sentence—"Let those that come after see to it that his name be not forgotten"—spoke too painfully of his absence, made of him a name only, a name threatened with oblivion.

It was eighteen years ago, eighteen years this very day, that they had met for the last time. On the last day of his leave from France they had climbed the downs together, scrambled up the earthwork, and walked to the edge of the cliff. He had laughed when she had clutched at his sleeve to stop him going too near the brink. The whole immense depth of air below them and the huge expanse of sea sparkled with sunshine. Out near the horizon a ship—an English battleship—drew a long, gauzy trail of smoke after it. Jim pointed to the horizon. "You'd never think, would you," he said, "that thousands of chaps were in the thick of it just over there?"

"Don't," she said. "Don't think of it. I don't want to think of it till. . . ."

"Till I'm there?"

She nodded, and they turned away from the cliff and walked across to the angle of the rampart. There they lay down, his arms round her. "Then you'll *wait* for me?" he whispered half jokingly. "Only a few months, till my next leave. Then we'll get married."

She pressed her cheek against his. "I don't have to wait," she said, her heart suddenly full. "I'm yours already."

For a while he did not speak. Then he said: "Yes, you're mine Mary, and I'm yours. Only we've got to wait till next leave to be married."

She shook her head. "We're married already."

Again he paused, as if thinking. Then he said: "But . . . but suppose I was to stop one?"

"Stop one?"

"Stop a shell or a bullet. Get knocked out."

She put her hand over his mouth. "Don't. Don't say such things."

"But it might happen," he said, when she had freed his mouth.

"That means we mustn't wait."

"But think, Mary, what might happen; to you, I mean."

"I'm thinking," she said. "That's why I say we mustn't wait."

It was already dark when they walked home together, and parted outside the gate of her home.

A week later, before she had received any letter from him, she was passing his mother's cottage and Mrs. Ansell called

to her from the door. Mary went to her, and she led her into the little front room, paused to shut the door, then turned on the girl a face woefully transformed. "Mary," she said, "Jim's gone."

"Gone." It was as if lightning had struck her. She felt it leap from her head to her heels.

"Killed," said Mrs. Ansell.

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When Mary knew she was to have a child she told her mother—weeping, as she spoke, not for shame, but for Jim. Her mother laid her arm round her shoulders. She spoke no word of rebuke, and, though she spoke no word of comfort either, Mary knew that she understood and sympathized. "I shall have to tell your father," was all she said.

"Will he be angry?" Mary asked.

"Yes," said the old woman, "but I'll manage him. You keep out of his way and say nothing."

Mary never knew of the encounter between her mother and father, nor that her father had wished to turn her out of doors and had resigned himself only when her mother had told him that, if Mary went, she would go with her. She knew only that, after that, her father never spoke to her, never took the least notice of her.

Two months later her mother told her that she was to go to an aunt in Devonshire and stay there till after her baby was born. What was to happen after that she did not ask, but she was resolved that, come what might, she would never be separated from the child. But the child, a little boy, was stillborn, and three months after his birth, Mary returned to her home.

It seemed to her that her life was finished. In her absence a new landlord had come to the Golden Lion. He was a bachelor, and her mother now worked at the inn, scrubbing floors and washing-up mugs and glasses. Soon after her return, her mother came home with the news that Mr. Brakefield wanted a handy girl to help in the bar and that she had mentioned Mary to him. A few days later Mary began her work at the inn.

Sam Brakefield was a good master to her and her mother. He was an easy-going, kindly man, ten years older than Mary.

At the end of a year, to her amazement and horror, he asked her to marry him. Ashen-faced and with a trembling lip she refused, but he waved aside her refusal. "You think it over, my dear," he said. "I don't want to hurry you. Think it over and see what your mother says."

Her mother, when Mary spoke of it, pressed her to accept Brakefield. "You must think of the future, my dearie," she said. "When your father and I are gone you'll have no home. You'll have to toil and moil, perhaps for a hard master or mistress. Mr. Brakefield's honest and he's kind. He'll be a good husband to you, Mary. Take him. It'll be a comfort to me to know you're well provided for."

"But I can't ever forget Jim," said Mary.

"You don't have to forget him. Keep him to yourself, that's all, and act fairly by your husband."

"But mustn't I tell him . . .?"

"About Jim?"

"About the child?"

"No. There's no call to tell him. No one here knows about it, and never will."

A month later Mary became Mrs. Brakefield.

It was getting dark when Mary Brakefield opened her eyes and found herself alone under the sky in the angle of the rampart. Dazed and chilly, she got to her feet. If she did not hurry she would never find the path down the steep slope. Already, when she had climbed down the great turf wall and emerged from the ditch, the village below her was lost in the gloom of its elms, and by the time she had reached the foot of the down and struck into the road the last pale streaks in the west were closing into the darkness of a stormy sky.

She felt desolate and tired by her long, lonely ecstasy. She clung to Jim, trying to keep him with her still, but he withdrew from her. Her spirit was too weak now to hold him, her attention too distracted by the need of keeping her path on the dark road. If only there was someone who knew, someone who would come towards her now, down this dark road, and as he passed her call out: "Good night, Mrs. Ansell." Those few short words would be enough to keep her and Jim together.

But the road was deserted, and, as she turned into the village, large drops of rain began to fall.

When she entered the inn her husband's voice greeted her. "Two gentlemen wanting tea, Mary. I've got the kettle on and shown them into the parlour, by the fire."

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The two young men had walked all day. They had lunched off beer and bread and cheese at an inn twelve miles away and had hoped to find another inn in the cove they had reached late in the afternoon. But no inn was there, and when they had asked for the nearest they had been directed to Netherhinton, four miles away. Now they sat, tired and contented, in the little parlour of the Golden Lion, one on each side of the fireplace, with their legs stretched to the warmth, waiting for the tea they had ordered.

When he had finished a cigarette, the more energetic of the two got out of his chair and, with his hands in the pockets of his shorts, began prowling round the room, examining the pictures and photographs. When he had reached the bookcase he called out to his friend: "I say, Guy, here's *The Return of the Native*, and *Jude*, and *Lorna Doone*, and the Bible, and *Pickwick*. Not a bad lot for a village inn."

He took down *Jude the Obscure*, opened the cover, and read, "*Mary Ansell*, 1919." *Pickwick* revealed the same name, and then he was interrupted by the opening of the door. A thin-faced woman brought in their tea on a tray. The young man, caught with *Pickwick* in his hand, spoke to her. "I've found a nice lot of books here," he said. "Are they yours?"

The pale, red-rimmed eyes met his. "Yes, sir," she said in her tired, toneless voice; "they're all mine."

She set the tea on the table. "Just ring the bell if you want anything, gentlemen," she said as she went quietly out.

They thanked her, and the other young man rose from his chair and went over to where his friend was standing. "What's this?" he said, bending his head to inspect Jim's scroll.

"Some poor devil that was killed in the war," said the first, and he read: "*Lance-corporal James Ansell*."

"Her son, I expect," said the other as they sat down to their tea.

When they had finished they rang for the bill, and the

thin-faced woman returned. How far was it, they asked, to Wareham?

Six miles, she told them; and there was a 'bus in twenty minutes' time if they were tired of walking.

"Good! Then, if you don't mind, we'll sit here till it comes."

"Certainly, sir," she said, without raising her eyes from the tray on which she was piling the used tea-things.

"Not exactly a cheerful specimen, is she?" said one to the other as they returned to their chairs beside the fire.

Five minutes before the time for the 'bus they slung their knapsacks on their backs and went out of the room. As they passed the kitchen door it was ajar, and the first young man called out a good night as he passed. "Good night, Mrs. Ansell," he called.

She was standing at the kitchen table, her pale eyes cast down, her mouth drooping bitterly at the corners, preparing supper for herself and her husband; but at the sound of the young man's voice her face bloomed suddenly as if kindled by some inner, spiritual light, and her mouth, its bitterness gone, took on the charming, wistful smile of a young girl.

BARNARD STACEY

The Devil's Ape

THE DEVIL'S APE

IN the cheerful glow from a cedar fire three men sat talking in serious tones, then lapsing into silence ; anxious-eyed, stern-faced, struggling with their fears.

"Was there any reason for Nickey to think he'd done it ?" asked Parker suddenly.

"What—killed Hugh ?" flared Wynch scornfully. "I'll take my oath he didn't. We ate our Temple dinners together before he took up painting. I know Nickey."

The two older men looked at him indulgently.

"So do I," said Mason quietly, rattling his pipe stem between his teeth.

"Then you know he didn't," pressed Wynch aggressively.

"I tell you I *don't* know," repeated Mason doggedly. The others looked at him suspiciously and Wynch clutched the arms of his chair.

"What ?" he demanded, but Mason didn't answer. Parker bent forward and cleared his throat.

"We're all friends of Nickey's here," he said soothingly. "Real friends ; but you were the only one of us with him that evening, Mason—with him all the time. You were at the inquest, too, afterwards, on poor Hugh."

He stopped for the emotion to clear from his voice. "We know the coroner's verdict, but tell us frankly what *did* happen ?"

The atmosphere had become strained. Mason felt their searching glances, but he didn't look up. He refilled his pipe. Then he faced them.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said in a weary tone, "then you can decide for yourselves. Personally, I can't, but—I must say this first to clear myself. I've built up my practice, such as it is"—he waved his K.C. and knighthood airily away—"on facts converted into evidence. It's the royal road to Law—so that I'm not a man easily spoofed or spoon-fed."

"The day the Huntsby case collapsed so dramatically I found myself at six o'clock with a free evening for once. I was at a loose end, too tired to bother about dressing so I slipped into a grill room and dined alone. It was early when I'd finished, so I strolled into the Mall wondering where to make for next, when I suddenly thought of Nickey.

"I hadn't seen him for ages, so I jumped into a taxi. You went to his rooms, didn't you, Wynch?"

Wynch nodded. "They were in the same building as Hugh's," he muttered.

"Yes, Hugh lived immediately above Nickey. His study was plumb over Nickey's sitting-room. Remember that: it's important. Nickey had a man with him—Charlie Somers; I hadn't seen him before. Nice chap, with a boyish smile. Well, Nickey was in great form. Apparently they'd been ragging Hugh and he'd got huffy. Threatened to complain or something—he was like that—and finally he'd turned them out and locked himself in.

"We three sat smoking and chatting about Nickey's latest picture—a modern Dante and Beatrice. He'd just bought a new lay figure; life-size thing it was, all jointed, and Nickey was very excited about it. Showed us how it worked, and stuck it up in all sorts of poses. They get those things up so well now, it was almost real.

"Presently there was a ring at the bell and Nickey went to the door himself. It was a parcel—left by some poor little wretch who'd been told to leave it on his way home and had lost his way, and was crying. You know how crazy Nickey is over children! He flung the parcel on the table—dashed about finding cake and fruit, gave the lad all his spare silver and some of mine, and sent him home in a taxi.

"When he came to look at the parcel, it wasn't for him at all. It was addressed to Hugh. In the dark the boy had mistaken the numbers.

"Nickey thought it a great joke. He pictured Hugh waiting patiently for bed socks or chest protectors. Hugh was such an ideal man to rag, with his frog's eyes behind those thick lenses. He'd not an atom of humour. Fancy a man setting out to be a surgeon and hating the sight of blood!

"Then Nickey had a brain wave. He suggested we should open the parcel and send Hugh some old boots and rubbish, and before we could stop him he'd cut the string. In the

paper was an old book—a solemn-looking tome, musty and yellow with age. He turned the pages over in disgust—couldn't read a word of it—and passed it over to us. I thought it was Chinese, the characters looked so weird, but Somers, who is apparently an authority on dead languages, became quite interested, and took the book on his knee.

"‘It's Sanskrit,’ he pronounced, ‘the ancient and sacred language of India. Lord! It's about Devil-Worship.’

"‘Devil-Worship,’ cried Nickey. ‘I didn't know there was such a thing.’

"Somers said that when he was in Bombay some fakir told him wonderful things were done in the heart of the Himalayas by the Devil-Worshippers. Meanwhile he was turning over the dog-eared pages.

"‘I say,’ he blurted out suddenly. ‘This book is the very thing—definite instructions for the practice of Devil-Worship. It actually gives the formula for casting or projecting a man's soul out of his body.’

"Nickey and I laughed. ‘You don't mean to say you believe such nonsense?’ I asked.

"‘I don't know,’ he replied guardedly. ‘Shouldn't like to say. If half the old man told me was true——’ And he went on deciphering, with Nickey looking over his shoulder.

"‘I say, Mason,’ exclaimed Nickey, ‘let's have a seance, or whatever they call it, and do a little devil-worshipping of our own. Call up the old boy—what d'you say, Charlie?’

"I thought Nickey was crazy, and told him so, but once he gets an idea into his head he is never satisfied until it's exploded.

"He began arranging the room, pushing the table back against the wall to give us plenty of working space, he explained. Then he went into his bedroom and came back with a bundle of joss-sticks which he lighted and stuck in vases round the room.

"You know what a curious effect that heavy scent has on the senses. It seems to unlock the gate of grotesque fancies or fears. Personally it sends me to sleep, and I wanted to be off, but Nickey wouldn't hear of it, practically bullied me into staying.

"Then the lights didn't suit him. ‘Devils like gloom,’ he said, and the next minute we were in the subdued light from a standard lamp, one of those red-shaded affairs you plug into the wainscoting with the end of a flex wire.

"Somers was taking the thing quite seriously, too. The book seemed to obsess him. He said we must have some definite line of action—some object upon which to focus our attention—somebody.

"And in a spirit of devilry, Nickey suggested Hugh. 'He'll make a splendid medium, swotting up there. Won't he be mad when I tell him to-morrow he hasn't got a soul.'

" 'Yes, but where are we going to send his soul ?' " worried Somers.

"I could see what was on the tip of Nickey's tongue, but he didn't say it. His eyes were wandering round the room, searching for an idea, when he saw the lay figure, and he clutched Somers' arm excitedly.

" 'The very thing—we'll command Hugh's soul to come out and enter that—wait a bit ; I'll dress it up—make it more realistic—more like——' But he didn't finish what he was saying.

"A fierce enthusiasm caught him. I watched him feverishly bursting open drawers, dragging out trousers, waistcoat and jacket. He even buttoned a collar round the neck and knotted a black tie with flowing ends. Finally, he sat the figure up in a chair with its hands resting on its knees and stepped back to survey it, but Somers put the finishing touch to it by seizing my glasses and balancing them on the aquiline nose.

"The effect was uncanny. Nickey was like a child with a new toy in his glee.

" 'Half-close your eyes, Mason ; no, blink a little,' " he persisted. 'Can't you imagine him ?'

"There certainly was a suggestion of Hugh about it. Of course, the clothes helped—Hugh always looked as if he'd got out of a rag bag—and the subdued lamplight encouraged one to imagine the foxy look in his glassy eyes.

" 'We must form a circle and link hands,' " directed Somers. 'I'll recite the formula from the book—it's only a few sentences, and we must all concentrate on Hugh—visualising his soul leaving his body and entering the dummy.'

"I still didn't like the idea—it seemed so childish—so bizarre—but I hadn't the courage to quarrel with Nickey. He was so desperately set on it. He danced over to my chair and pulled me up by the arms.

" 'Come on, Mason,' " he cried, and in a sceptical frame of mind I took their hands and we made a ring round the chair

where the figure sat, stiff and solemn, and the seance commenced.

"After a few seconds Somers began reciting something in a dreary monotone. I couldn't understand what he said, but it reminded me of the droning of native priests, while we glued our eyes on the figure.

"Every now and then Somers stopped, and we waited placidly for the chanting to go on again. Gradually, but unconsciously, we began to get serious. In spite of ourselves, our minds were fired with the idea. The atmosphere became mesmeric. In the pauses the silence seemed pregnant with possibilities. A feeling of waiting and watching for something crept over us. The expectancy was almost painful. As it became tenser I had a vague feeling of uneasiness; all sense of time and space had vanished.

"I stole a glance at Nickey. His face was flushed with excitement. Suddenly I felt him grip my hand tight. I turned sharply, and saw he had raised himself on his toes with his head half tilted upwards, as if he were straining to hear something.

"Somers had come to one of his pauses, when, without any warning, there was a peal of fierce maniacal laughter immediately above our heads. Just one peal—no more—then a pulsating, awful silence. An icy fear went down my spine. It was such an inhuman sound—bloodless—like a triumphant devil. I wanted to do something—make some physical movement. I wanted to shout—scream—anything—but I couldn't.

"And then something happened. Something we couldn't see, but felt—something that made us afraid with a sweating fear. *Somebody—something came into the room.* We became aware of another presence. We sensed it—that warning, creepy sensation all down your back, of being watched by somebody you couldn't see.

"Stealthily, afraid of being caught, I twisted my head and looked at Nickey. Then my blood froze. His face was distorted with horror and his lower lip quivered convulsively, but it was the terror—the dying hope in his eyes—that galvanised my sinking spirits.

"'Nickey! Nickey!' I shouted out. 'Stop it—d'you hear me? Stop it!'

"He shivered and passed his hand across his forehead. Then he started giggling—laughing—shrieking, *in the same diabolical way we had heard above.* 'It's Hugh,' he raved. Hugh,

I tell you. He's here—there—look at him—he's grinning at me; he's——”

“The lay figure had fallen back in the chair, with its head resting on the back, but turned towards Nickey. The right arm was raised.

“Nickey was pugnacious with fear. ‘I’ll stop his gibbering,’ he yelled; ‘you see.’ He darted back to the table, and snatching up a long steel paper-knife, sprang towards the chair, but he must have caught his foot in the flex from the lamp, for the next instant the room was in darkness.

“I heard a scuffle, then short gasps of men struggling for mastery, as I grovelled to find the switch. I was clumsy in locating it, but when I turned on the lights, Nickey had his knee on the dummy’s chest, and with blind savagery drove the paper-knife fiercely into its neck. Then he seized the figure, and with a passionate ferocity flung it to the floor.

“Even as it fell there was a second thud, of something falling heavily *on the floor above*. Whatever we were going to say—died in our throats. We made for the door, the three of us, but Nickey had previously locked it against intrusion.

“We flung it open and rushed up the stairs. We rang and hammered and kicked on the front door, but nobody came. Then Somers ran down again, and we knew he had gone for the porter. Neither Nickey nor I spoke while we waited, but, like frightened children, we felt for each other’s hand.

“When they came back, and we got into the little hall, we went straight to Hugh’s study, but the door was locked on the inside. Bending down, we could see the key in the lock, yet there wasn’t a sound from within, so we put our shoulders against the door. It gave after the fifth attempt, and I fell into the room.

“The light was on, but everything was disarranged, as if there had been a struggle and on the floor just about where Nickey had thrown down the figure, was Hugh—dead! Blood was slowly oozing from a wound in the neck, *in the identical spot where the paper-knife was sticking in the figure downstairs*. But there was no knife or implement of any sort that we could find.

“And we still hadn’t said a word to each other—only Nickey whispered something to the porter, and he went away while we quietly sat down to wait for the police.

L. A. G. STRONG

Chailey's Folly

CHAILEY'S FOLLY

I

THE buzzing ceased, and the Governor's voice sounded clear again over the 'phone.

"It is true then, that you're coming to the moor for a holiday?"

"Yes. For a holiday."

John Rogan put a slight emphasis on the last word; and smiled to himself to hear the other pause.

"I thought perhaps you might like to give me a little assistance."

"It's only a short holiday, you know," protested Rogan. "However, I shall, of course, find time to come and see you."

"I should hope so." The Governor paused again. "As a matter of fact, I want you to see someone else."

"Oh?"

"It's that infernal Chailey, Rogan. He's becoming a positive nuisance. Positive menace to law and order. Confoundedly awkward position, for me."

"For you, Evershed? But how?"

The voice at the other end was understood to mutter something about "a laughing-stock".

"You've a good deal of influence over the fellow, haven't you?" it went on.

Rogan laughed.

"I don't know that unsuccessfully defending a man gives him any great confidence in one," he replied. "If I'd got him off, now, there might have been some chance——"

"If you'd got him off he wouldn't be where he is," snapped the other. "I wish to the Lord you had. You'd have saved me a deal of worry."

"What's this, what's this! The Governor of one of His Majesty's prisons wishing that a guilty man had defeated the ends of justice? Well, well, Evershed, I'm surprised at you."

"Go on. Be humorous," came the disconsolate voice. "Will you see the chap, or won't you?"

"Certainly. I'm all curiosity. I intended to pay him my respects, in any case. But I still can't understand why you don't simply get rid of him."

"Can't, man. No power. He's not actually breaking the law."

"Oh, come. Don't tell me. There are ways of working these little matters."

"I'd be glad to hear of 'em, then. We have our legal advisers, you know. The point may not have occurred to you."

Rogan smiled again. He was enjoying himself.

"I know. Huckworthy is one of them, isn't he? I had the privilege of—er—appearing on the opposite side to him a short while ago."

"Getting too big for your boots, aren't you?"

"You'd better be polite to me, or I shan't come."

"Oh, go to hell."

"Thanks."

"You will come, then?"

"If only to congratulate my old client."

There was an abrupt sound from the other end. Rogan, well pleased, put the receiver softly back in its place, and sat down by the fire to consider.

So Mortimer Chailey's mad whim was taking effect, after all! What a man! Brilliant, dangerous, his brilliance and danger much lessened by an almost insane pride which would never let him forget a slight or an injury. It was this revengefulness which had led to his downfall. A system of fraud so vast, so simple, and so perfectly screened that it must have run on undetected for years, was revealed owing to Chailey's personal spite against a colleague. The colleague, in a deal so small that Chailey could have written off a hundred like it, had got the better of him.

Chailey, his pride stung, pursued the man: attention was drawn to the affairs of his company; and a petty, insensate lawsuit led to the arrest of the prosecutor, Mortimer Chailey, world-famous financier, on a colossal charge of fraud. The arrest shook the City. Chailey out of custody, and free to act, might conceivably save the situation, or at least reduce the losses. Chailey convicted could mean one thing only—the ruin of hundreds. The law, however, can take no

cognisance of such matters. Once its machinery is set going, the process cannot be delayed. Chailey, even if he had had no means of his own, could have commanded an almost unlimited sum from the City for his defence : but he had enough to spare.

Then came his first set-back. Eminent advocates, despite the celebrity of the case, seemed far from anxious to undertake it. The closer they looked into it, the less anxious they were : since it appeared that the prosecution were going to have matters all their own way. Moreover, the attitude of Chailey himself, as soon as he heard of their hesitation, did nothing to win them over. It was not till a week had passed that his harassed solicitor came to inform him that they had at last secured an advocate—one John Rogan—who expressed himself willing to conduct the defence.

"Rogan ! Rogan ! Who the hell's Rogan ! I tell you, I want the best that money can buy."

There was a long scene, but at last the cornered man consented to see his counsel. After two minutes, he realized that he had met his match.

"Look here, Mr. Chailey," the Irishman interrupted him, holding up a large hand. "There's not the least use in going on like that. We're neither of us here for our health. You want to get off—for obvious reasons. I want to get you off, for my own sake, not for yours. It so happens that the same result will suit us both. Now : tell me what you like."

Well, thought Rogan, leaning back and looking at the ceiling, I didn't get him off. No man alive could have done that. But I got him off three of the charges, and I made my name, for good and all.

He might have gone on that, strangely enough, he and Chailey had won each a real respect for the other. Chailey admired the advocate's frankness and independence of mind : Rogan admired the other's skill, and understood, even if he could not agree with, his passionate conviction that he had committed no crime, and that society had done him a mortal injury. Chailey believed, and half made Rogan believe, that despite the crookedness of his start he could have brought off his bluff with immense profit, and made a fortune for all who had trusted him.

He was a bad prisoner. Not a single day's remission did he earn, but served the full bitter five years. And then—well, now came the Governor's trouble.

"Put me down here, will you?"

The car stopped at the edge of a little wood, and Rogan, pulling up his coat collar, stepped out into the narrow moorland lane. Tiny trickles of water, gleaming in the headlights, ran between the stones of the road: the pine trees, looming above, were heavy with moisture, and every breath of air brought down a shower of drops.

The driver, after a puzzled look at Rogan, went on downhill to a place where he could turn. Rogan, who had purposely over-shot his mark, walked sharply up the hill till he came to a gate. Turning in, he stood shivering, until he heard the car pass on its homeward way.

Then he emerged again into the lane. Ten minutes' walking brought him to his goal. There was a moon behind the mist, and it showed up, clearly enough, the long rectangular building with the stone courtyard and the extraordinary high stone gateway. Grimacing to himself Rogan passed under its shadow, crossed the yard, and tugged vigorously at an old iron bell-pull. At once, there broke out in the still dark house a hideous clangour, a jangling of alarm bells that took half a minute to subside into resentful, rusty silence. Then came heavy steps, and the sound of bolts and chains.

Rogan clicked his tongue.

"Really," he said under his breath, "it's too childish."

The door swung open, and he stepped into a dark hall, lit only by a diminutive candle at the far end. Wriggling out of his coat, he essayed to hand it to the form in the gloom behind him.

"Pass forward."

There was no authority in the voice. It sounded hollow, unconvinced.

"Oh, all right. Anything you like."

Rogan walked forward in the direction of the candle. Before he reached it a door opened, framing in brilliant light a figure which he at once recognised as that of his one-time client, Mortimer Chailey. At the same moment his hat and coat were whipped away from behind with an almost alarming suddenness.

"Ah, Mr. Rogan! What a pleasure to entertain you here. It is indeed good of you to honour us with your company."

"Us?"

Rogan, still dazzled by the light, his hand being cordially shaken, was drawn into the room, and the door closed behind him.

"Yes. These gentlemen, who are staying with me, will all be delighted to make your acquaintance."

He steered the bewildered Rogan round, to confront a company of six or seven grinning old lags, all like their host, dressed in convict clothes. They sat about the room in deep leather chairs, or lolled on sofas, smoking cigars.

Rogan bowed.

"Delighted. But—" He turned to his host: "I am sorry. I didn't realize it was a fancy dress evening."

Chailey's face changed.

"What we choose to wear is our own affair," he said.

"Certainly. Certainly. I commend you. A pleasing asceticism. You are accustoming yourselves to the pleasures of civilized life gradually, lest they go to your heads. Besides—so economical."

"Look here," said Chailey harshly, "You have come at your own request. What for, God knows; but the least you can do is to keep a civil tongue in your head."

"My dear Chailey, I'm sorry. But I really think you ought to have warned me, so that I could have procured suitable apparel."

"You have no right to wear this uniform," cried Chailey. "Society has not injured you. You are not the victim of its hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness. Look at the man—" He turned to the others. "Look at the man who would like to have put on our uniform for a joke."

"No joke, Chailey," cut in Rogan quickly, before they could answer. "And, even if society had not injured me, as you put it, I have often done my best for those whom it has."

"That's right, governor," came a voice from the back of the room. "Always for the defence, John Rogan."

"That's right."

"So he is."

An approving murmur ran round the company. Taking advantage of it, Rogan crossed to the fireplace, and stood warming himself.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am your guest to-night, and by my own desire. Let us forget everything but that."

"Right."

Chailey, giving his lean shoulders a shake, went over to a side table.

"Have a drink?"

"Thanks."

The atmosphere was quiet, but still a little strained, when a man in warder's uniform flung open the door.

"Dinner is served, gentlemen," he announced.

Of all the meals John Rogan ate in his life, that dinner was the strangest. Eight men in broad arrows, and himself in full evening dress, were waited upon by uniformed warders. At least—not quite. At his first sight of them, Rogan's heart leaped: for it seemed that here was an instant solution of Evershed's trouble. It is against the law for any person to wear His Majesty's uniform who is not entitled to do so. A closer look, however, dashed his hopes. The uniforms were almost identical, but not quite. Chailey had been too cunning.

The warders, at first disconcerted that an outsider should see their degradation, seemed speedily to forget, and relapsed to an accustomed servility that was even more horrible to Rogan than their first sickly smiles. The conversation seldom strayed far from its spiritual homes, the Old Bailey, and the Court of Criminal Appeal: but all, save Chailey and a young dark haired man, whose eyebrows met thickly above his nose, seemed to take their convictions as a matter of course, and their present situation as a joke.

Chailey, supported by an occasional fierce monosyllable from the young man, remained morose. Rogan was glad when the meal was at an end, and he found himself at last closeted with Chailey in the latter's study. There, the spectacle of his host lolling in broad arrows in a deep leather armchair seemed more bizarre than ever.

For some time they talked of neutral matters, the City, the state of business, and Rogan's career. Then Chailey asked the question which had been trembling on his tongue all the time.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of my house and retinue, eh?"

Rogan knocked the ash off his cigar before replying.

"I was afraid you were going to ask me that," he said.

The other's face darkened.

"Indeed?"

"If you really want to know what I think——"

"That's why I asked you."

"Childish, my dear Chailey. Nursery games. I simply can't understand," he went on quickly, giving the other no chance to interrupt, "how a man of your intelligence can behave in such an infantile fashion. I should have thought your pride would stop you, if nothing else."

"Pride?" choked the other. "My pride——?"

"If I had taken a toss, I'm damned if I'd advertise to all the world how sore I felt."

Chailey controlled himself.

"Would you have the goodness to explain what you mean?"

"Why, man, you're making yourself a perfect laughing-stock. You've simply gone to pieces. Instead of determining to get your own back in a reasonable, manly way, you skulk down here, afraid to face the world——"

"WHAT!"

"What else can you call it? You skulk down here, king of your fancy dress castle, like a little boy who's been put in the corner and won't come out when his time's up, trying to pretend he's enjoyed it. Good heavens, what a come-down! Charabancs coming and pulling up to laugh at Chailey's Folly! That's what it's called—Chailey's Folly. You think they come to admire, to marvel at your daring. Man, they come to laugh at you! The rude, sulky little boy, sticking out his tongue!"

Rogan, who had been leaning back, addressing the ceiling, out of the corner of his eye saw Chailey spring from his chair. For a moment he thought his host would strike him. Turning round, as if in innocent surprise, he saw Chailey's face livid with anger. Then a sneer came over it.

"Very clever, Mr. John Rogan! Very clever indeed! But not quite clever enough. I'm not to be bluffed quite so easily." He rubbed his forehead and managed to laugh. "You've given something away, my dear Rogan. Now I know that I'm getting a bit of my own back. Our dear friend Governor Evershed wouldn't have sent for you to come and bait me here if he wasn't anxious to get rid of me. Oh, no, Mr. Rogan. I'm not so easily disposed of as that." He pulled out a silk handkerchief, and mopped his face with it. "You very nearly made me lose my temper. I congratulate you."

Rogan laughed.

"I thought you were rising rather easily. Living in a place

like this must be bad for one's sense of humour. No, but seriously, Chailey: you'd much better clear out. You're doing no good here. No harm, either, except to yourself. I've always given you good advice, haven't I?"

"Yes. And you've been well paid for it."

"Well, now I'm going to give you a bit gratis: the best I've ever given you. Drop all this nonsense, and come back to town."

"I'll pay for your advice when I want it," said Chailey, with a pale grin. "I only value what costs me something."

"Well, I'll give you the same advice professionally, if you prefer it."

"Shut up, man. You've said enough, and more than enough. Have another drink."

Rogan shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"As you please," he said. "You'll wish you had taken my advice, all the same. You have n't a chance with Evershed. He'll get rid of you, double quick."

"He can't," flashed the other. "I'm doing no wrong."

"What about your servants?"

"I pay tax for them—and their liveries."

"How did you get the poor devils?"

"Bribed 'em when I was in, and blackmailed 'em when I came out."

"I thought as much. You're an attractive character, Chailey."

"Bah! Jackals like that—I've no compunction. They chose to serve me instead of their excellent master. They go on serving me. That's all."

"You'll be nobbled, Chailey, and that right soon," declared Rogan, sitting up and holding out his glass. "You can't go on running a place like this, in open mockery of his Majesty's prison and in defiance of all law and order. You're a scandal to the neighbourhood, and you'll be nobbled. I'll be sorry to see it, but——"

"Oh, no, you won't—a virtuous pillar of society like you."

"Oh, yes, I will. I'm always sorry to see a clever man make a fool of himself."

"I think it's time we joined the rest and had a little music," said Chailey drily. "One of our company is very talented. His rendering of the celebrated ballad of 'Samuel Hall' is a pleasure to hear. Perhaps you don't know it?"

"Oh," replied Rogan, with a grim smile, heaving himself out of his chair, "I know it all right."

III

ONE evening, nearly a fortnight after the events last related, when a dense mist lay thick upon the moor, the denizens of Chailey's were startled by the sudden clanging of the bell, followed by an agonized rat-tat upon the massive front door. Before they had time to exchange surprised glances the clamour broke out afresh. Their babble of comment was stilled by the appearance of Chailey.

"Open on the chain, Richards," he commanded and followed the ex-warder down the passage, keeping well out of sight in the darkness.

The bolts shot back, the door opened a foot, and jarred on the heavy chain.

"What d'you want?" snarled the ex-warder, as fiercely as he could, buoyed up by Chailey's presence close behind him.

"Let me in, for God's sake," gasped a voice. "They're after me. They'll get me. Oh, let me in!"

"Who are after you?"

Chailey shot forward, elbowing Richards roughly out of the way.

"All of them—from the prison. The mist—I made a bolt —"

Chailey uttered a startled exclamation.

"Are they on your track now?"

"I don't know. I don't know. Oh, for God's sake, let me in."

There was a pause.

"Oh, for God's sake! Won't you—"

"Never fear. I'll let you in."

Chailey undid the chain, and a figure plunged in almost on top of him and fell to the floor.

"Here—a light, you fool."

Richards ran back and returned with a torch, which he flashed on the recumbent form.

"A young 'un, eh?"

Taking his arm Chailey helped the fugitive roughly to his feet. The light showed a well-bred, sensitive face, now pale and haggard.

"Here. What about those hands?"

The keen eye of Chailey had at once noted that the young man's hands showed no sign of hard labour.

"I know. I only came up with the batch on Monday. I couldn't stick it. Look——"

He pointed to a row of newly formed blisters just above the palm.

"Only just come, eh!" Chailey's eyes were blazing. He turned to Richards. "We'll get him away. God, what a score! Escapes after two days! Don't you worry," he added quickly. "We'll get you away. For the moment—a hiding-place."

"What about the bloodhounds, governor?" doubtfully asked the ex-warder. "They'll track him here."

"Buzzacott can fix that," cried Chailey. "He's done it before. With aniseed. We need only fix it a couple of hundred yards from the house. They'll never find him. Here—Buzzacott!" He turned and hurried back to the living-room—only to find it empty. Custom was too strong for the guests of Mortimer Chailey. When in doubt they hid.

Reassured, they all emerged like snails after rain; but before Chailey and the chuckling expert could get to work an even more imperative thundering at the door sent all back into hiding again. The financier, obliged to answer the door himself, was confronted by a small army of prison officials, come to search for an escaped convict whom, presently to the extreme prejudice of the aforesaid Mortimer Chailey, they found and apprehended. Mortimer Chailey they also apprehended; but before he was led away the Governor of the prison arrived on the scene, and expressed a wish to interview him. Chailey at first refused, but was at last persuaded to accede to the Governor's request. The two went off together to Chailey's study.

IV

*H.M. Prison, Highmoor,
March 2nd, 19—.*

My dear Rogan,

You may be interested to hear, if your nephew has not already told you his part in the business, that, upon reflection, I decided to act on your very irregular suggestion. I got into touch with your

nephew, and had him out to stay with me till a suitable occasion arose for trying out your plan. As you know, when one doesn't want them, there are mists here every day in the week. When one does, one has to wait a fortnight.

However, last night there came a real mist, thick as could be wished. We motored your nephew as close as we dared, for the mist was so thick he'd have got lost if he'd tried to find the place for himself: and he ran up and down the hill till he was half-dead. He doesn't do things by halves, that young man. He insisted on breaking stones for an hour and a half yesterday morning to roughen his hands. Said they'd be the first things Chailey and Co. would look at, if they were at all suspicious. I doubt if that repertory theatre will hold him for long.

Anyway, he staggered off, and presently we heard him raising hell's delight at Chailey's door. For a while it seemed they weren't going to let him in; but they did at last, and we settled down to wait. We gave them twenty minutes, and then stormed the place. Chailey himself had to let us in: his precious crew of gaolbirds were all hiding under the beds. We found young Noel—with a little assistance from himself—most cunningly hidden. In fact, but for his help we mightn't have found him yet.

Acting on my instructions, they handcuffed Chailey and made a few remarks on the subject of the sentence given for harbouring fugitives from justice, and the sort of time likely to be enjoyed by those who had endeavoured to make prison officials ridiculous, etc., etc. He was pretty green by the time I came along. When I thought it had sunk in enough I made them bring him along to his study, and there I gave him his chance. You should have seen his face! Upon my word, I was half-sorry for the brute myself.

"You ring that bell," he said, and I rang it; and a warder came in and unlocked his handcuffs. Then he sat down at his desk and wrote me an undertaking to leave his rotten place in twenty-four hours, and take his gang of toughs with him.

He's been as good as his word. The last car load of them passed through the village half an hour ago.

Well, Rogan, I can't deny I'm grateful to you: though, as you know, I didn't half like the means adopted to get rid of the fellow. Still, it's good to be rid of him. Needless to say, he knows nothing of your share in the matter——

Rogan broke off and cocked an eye at the ceiling.

"I bet he guessed," he said to himself, and smiled, knowing

the pride of Mortimer Chailey to be such that never, never, by so much as a gesture, would he betray the knowledge that his mind had been read, and the right trap set to catch him.

"Well," continued Rogan, picking up the letter again, "I'll keep out of his way, and he'll keep out of mine, and that will please both of us."

He looked at the end of the letter and burst into a laugh.

"Really, you know," he said, "they're very much alike."

ANTONY MARSDEN

Dusk Below Helvellyn

DUSK BELOW HELVELLYN

ON Dunmail Raise I left the car by the huge tumbled cairn that marks the top of the pass, and began to climb the steep mountain.

There is awe in great hills, because the centuries have not altered them. I thought, resting for breath: We Cockneys have no abiding city; I shall go home next week and find new landmarks. But here . . . A thousand years ago, when the last King of Cumberland fell fighting below this spot, the Saxon victors must have wiped the sweat from their eyes and leaned on their hacked swords and stared down this same valley. And the hill where I stood seemed thronged with hurrying ghosts—those loyal few who snatched King Dunmail's crown from the massacre and fled up here with it through the summer dusk to hurl it into a tarn.

I pressed on. I must make haste myself if I meant to climb to the tarn and spend some time by it and get down again before dark. The sun was westering, Helvellyn's flanks turning violet; a little breeze stirred the grasses . . . In about half an hour I crossed a desolate saddle between two peaks and saw the tarn down below.

It lay in a shallow crater of grass and rock, jet-black under the mountain. I skirted the crater's rim till I could see beyond the tarn down a long, empty pass into Patterdale. In a short while I came on what I took to be a ruined sheepfold.

A V-shaped gash ran deep into the solid rock of the fell, across whose mouth, some twenty feet from where its two sides converged, lay a rough barrier of fallen stones as though a wall had once closed it. I took my seat on them and had unwrapped the remnant of my sandwiches when a gruff voice spoke behind me:

"You've a long step down t' pass, if you're going on into Patterd'le?"

I sprang up, startled out of my wits. The light was good

enough : I could have sworn that the deep cleft was empty when I glanced into it not thirty seconds before ; and yet he must have been where I now saw him—at the far end of it, between two ten-foot walls of vertical rock, with a sheep-hook across his knees. He stood up and beckoned me. "Sit here, lad—out of t' wind !"

He was of that Norse type which lingers unmistakably among the Cumbrian fells—gaunt, big-boned, yellow-haired, with eyes of a peculiarly bright blue. "I—I wasn't expecting you," I said foolishly. And he nodded.

"Nay. It's lonely, this spot." He leaned against the rock wall, and, with a kind of truculent courtesy—I don't know how else to describe it—motioned me towards the slab on which he had been seated. Still rather taken aback, I held out my sandwiches. He declined.

"Nay, I don't trouble food much——" The blue eyes stared at me fixedly . . . My first surprise past, I felt certain misgivings : not on account of anything he had said—there is a blunt directness about Cumbrian folk which sounds like rudeness to strangers—but because I remembered I had forty pounds in my breast pocket, and because my gold watch-chain seemed to be the focus-point of that fixed, meditant stare. Had there been even some slight emphasis in his last remark : "I don't trouble *food* much" . . . ? And then I realised, quite suddenly, that in giving up his place he had interposed himself between me and retreat.

I said, as casually as I could manage : "But I'm not crossing to Patterdale ; I'm with a party on the other road——"

"On t' Raise?" he nodded quietly. "That's a good step down, too."

His manner increased my uneasiness. His eyes had shifted and were staring straight into mine—a little mockingly, I fancied, as though he guessed at my thoughts. I said firmly : "It's none so far—and a pleasant walk if you know how to take care of yourself!" He made no comment on that, and I went on : "I came to take a look at the tarn ——"

"What for?" he asked bluntly.

"Well, since you're interested—because I've been hearing an old tale about Dunmail Raise : how a king's crown was chucked into this tarn after some great battle, and how the ghosts of his old soldiers are supposed to fish it out once a year——"

I began to resent the fellow's scrutiny; no doubt he was honest enough—the idea of footpads in a place like this was a trifle ridiculous, and, anyhow, he was no tramp, that was obvious; a fellside shepherd, I supposed. But what the devil did it matter to him why I'd walked up to the tarn?

I thought: that settles you! You've asked and you're answered. Make what you can of it—I'll bet you never heard of Dunmail. . . . After a short pause he remarked:

"Aye, that's right. They still do."

"Do what?"

"Fish t' crown up. I've seen 'em at it, many's the time."

"You've *seen* them? But that's only an old tale, that's——"

"You don't hold wi' it, then?"

"I should think not! I——"

"Then what t' hell d'you come up for?" He relaxed, crossing leisurely towards the tumbled stones of the wall, and sat down (but he still kept between me and the open fellside, I noticed). His tone, though rough, was more friendly; a note of banter came into it; there was a gleam of humour in the frosty stare of his disquieting eyes. "You're from London, likely? That's farther nor I've been—nor want to. I've heard tell London folks has dug themselves holes, so's they can scuttle to and fro like rats from one end of t' town till the other."

"Yes, that's true——"

"I'll believe you . . . though, mind, that takes a dom'sight more belief nor any ghost-tales, I reckon! But I'll believe it if you tell it me—you and me's no call to swap lies." He leaned forward. "And I'm telling you, I've watched them heathen sojers fetch their crown out o' there——" He jerked his head towards the tarn. "If you don't choose to take it from me—well, no need. But fair's fair, mister!"

I sat dumb. It had most certainly not crossed my mind that I'd a madman to deal with—but need this fellow be mad? Ghost-tales are current in most corners of England . . . besides, there was a sort of crazy logic about his argument that defeated me: to an unbiased mind the Underground Railway might be as phenomenal as any ghost that ever howled. I asked presently:

"Tell me just what you have seen."

He shrugged. "Eh, nowt much to tell! There's a round dozen of them trails theirselves up here every year—slow,

like they was dead-beat; when they've gotten t'crown, they're off down t' fell again . . . but you ken t' story? They rap on Dunmail Cairn wi'tit; and t' old boy tells 'em: 'Not yet l' So in an hour they're all back. On a clear night you'll sec t' crown flash when it's pitched out intil t' water, plop, it goes. . . . This spot's grand for watching 'em. They cross above, over t' gap; then they fetch round in a long sweep down till t' waterside. They're shy, some fashion—aye, they give t' house a wide berth l'"

I stared. The place was utterly desolate. "The house l Whose house?"

"Mine—— l"

His voice changed abruptly. He stood up, towering gauntly between me and escape. "Mine l Mine it was, and mine it bides—aye, till t' Day of Judgment l" I met his eyes again . . . and grew suddenly most afraid

"I—see no house here——" I faltered.

"Because you're sitting on't . . . nay, let be, you're welcome l No fault o' yourn if . . . him whose sin it was, he's in Hell l" His voice rang harsh and menacing as he stood there athwart the ruined wall that had once been a cottage, with the wild shoulder of Helvellyn beyond him and the setting sun in his eyes. "Old tales, you're after? Nay. I'll give you summat bitterer nor heathen battles and such l" His eyes blazed at me; I shrank back. "You've heard tell o' John Grierson?"

I shook my head.

"When this house stood, it was his'n . . . There was a power o' smuggling in the mountains, them days. They'd run their boatloads into Calder River or Drigg, where there'd be lads to lead them up Wasd'le—thirteen miles through the dark; then next night, lads from Borrerd'le 'ud fetch them over the gap, and across the fell to Watendlath; and the third night by Dunmail Cairn and past here into Patterd'le. It's a long step, though, from Watendlath to Patterd'le on a mucky midwinter night; so if t' weather turned rough——"

He broke off, and looked at me knowingly. "I'll say no more nor this—on rough nights Grierson slept soundly l There'd be a tramping in his dreams, maybe, and the smell of a lantern: and in the morning, piled against yon wall where his bed wasn't, two'three dozen packs wi' rope slings to 'em. They'd bide there all day, while Grierson went about his work—he'd got his sheep on the fell—and left his door locked behind

him; and the next night he'd dream o' tramping feet again; and come dawn, t' packs was gone. But he took dom' good care he never waked from such a dream, Grierson didn't: nor saw no faces; nor he didn't reckernize any voice. And when he did wake, it 'ud be broad day and not a Christian in sight, and a gold piece left on the table."

"But smuggling's dead——" I exclaimed. The fierce pale eyes stared at me.

"There's a gey lot o' things that's reckoned dead, still goes on."

"This must have been a long time ago?"

"Long enough. But what's time hereabouts? T' mountains don't change. . . John Grierson did none too bad. Many's the hunnerdweight o' stuff that's been stacked up where you're set, mister. Salt, they'd fetch over: brandy from t' Isle of Man: Scotch whisky from Galloway. He'd a clay pot of golden guineas beneath this floor—you med say he was miserly: or you med put it he foresee the day he'd be too old to graze sheep. But he never liv't to enjoy them ——"

The eyes burned at me, menacing; a nameless fear held me still.

"One night John Grierson dreamt the last of his dreams; and the next time the lads come by, t' sheep had got a new master. . . eh, no questions asked! It was all one to them, they left their guineas all t' same—but it wasn't Grierson collected 'em."

I asked unsteadily: "What happened to Grierson, then?" And for a moment he stood glowering down at me, with contempt and mockery in his eyes.

"Man, you're none too bright? I'll tell you what happened Grierson: a shepherd-stick through his windpipe! Aye, a stick like this one, it was——" He raised it suddenly, so that I saw the wicked-looking iron spike in the end of it; if he had plunged it into my neck a' that instant, I believe I could not have stirred.

"He'd nobbut stepped out till the tarn with his bit kettle—round sunset, near enough the time o' night it is now—when this other feller slipped down intil t' house from the moss-hole where he'd been hid. Black-dark, inside t' door. . . so when Grierson showed clear against the light, he got the spike in his gullet. And then head-down into a moss-hole, and some rocks and sods on the top. That's what happened him."

I recoiled sick. "But if this wasn't found out——"

"Found out!" he echoed sombrely. "What way'd it ever be found out—in the like o' this place—ye fool?"

"But *you* knew? You——"

"I'd good reason."

"Then you—*you*——" Fear left me—or some sharper agony of dread drove it out. I leapt up with a cry. I had my walking-stick—less stout than his, but I was far past thinking of that. I sprang towards him. He gave ground . . . next moment, yelling incoherently, I was in hot pursuit as he fled from me up the naked slope of the fell. But he outdistanced me easily; I was no match for that long, shambling shepherd-trot of his, which left me panting behind him. I pulled up. He glanced round: stopped likewise: and returned towards me, three or four steps.

I called out: "You keep your distance. I'm going back . . . this time to-morrow you'll be lai' by the heels——!" I feared him no longer; his headlong flight had snapped the spell which those uncanny eyes seemed to lay on me, and I felt nothing but rage. Yet I was near enough to see their glance bent on me angrily, as he answered:

"Take time! Who t' hell d'you think you're talking to?"

"I know who I'm talking to—because you've told me yourself; you're Grierson's murderer, that's who!"

He stood there motionless, looking down at me—ten yards off, on the bare open fellside with no cover at all. His eyes still blazed; yet when he spoke at last, his voice was no longer truculent, but thin and fading like a distant cry from high hills. He said. "You're wrong, lad. I'm Grierson . . ."

And vanished before I could speak.

GEORGE R. PREEDY

. *Crab-Apple Harvest*

CRAB-APPLE HARVEST

THE old woman pushed her truck through the soldiers gathered on the outskirts of the ruined village. Corded to the truck was a large rudely-made box in the shape of a coffin. The soldiers were amazed, for it was amusing that anyone should think of burying their dead when corpses were as common in Silesia as hedgerow berries.

They began to gather round the rude bier, offering to challenge, to interfere. The beldame was plainly glad to pause at her task. She stopped, rested on the hand-cart and wiped with the ragged ends of her tattered shawl the dirty sweat from her face. She was greatly fatigued; had she not been as strong as a draught-mare she would have been dead of starvation, plague or fright, long since.

Some of the soldiers jeered.

"Where are you going, *ma belle*? Where did you get that coffin? Crazy hag, did you see the bonfire in the churchyard last night after the bomb had made a hole? Plenty of coffins there, *ma foi*! And fine yellow skulls inside. *Mon Dieu*! They seemed glad of a little warmth by the way they grinned at us."

Swinging his arms across his chest a cuirassier added through blue lips: "You have a damned early winter in this infernal country!"

The old woman had a little recovered her breath. Only a slight trembling of her strong jaw showed her age and her exhaustion.

"It is my husband—my man—he is dead of famine; I am taking him to the little cemetery which the nuns keep on the hill. He used to work for them and they always promised to give him a burying."

"How did you make the coffin?" asked a slim cornet. He was young enough to be depressed by the devastated country, the constant massacres. His fine eyes were inflamed

by smoke and wine, but his complexion, despite the rigours of military life, was clear and smooth above his blue uniform.

"My husband was a carpenter, he made his own coffin when wood was cheap."

The soldiers, yawning, heavy-headed, stared; there was something monstrous about the old hag, so powerful, so gaunt, with great worn hands, lean chaps rough with silver hairs, dried saliva at the corners of her lips, and a glance direct, vigorous, perhaps crazy.

"Very likely," suggested the sergeant, embittered by a shattered hand roughly bandaged (even the victors lacked almost everything), "the harridan has some money or good stuff in that box; I have heard of such dirty tricks, *vielle fille*!"

The cornet again languidly approached the hand-cart; he sneered at the thought of any booty being left in Klatz; why, it was a wonder that the old woman was alive herself. The loungers grinned to see him retreat, for the odour of decay had struck disgust into even his nostrils, no longer sensitive.

"*Parblieu*, you have kept the carrion long enough, *ma fille*," he said, holding his nose.

"May His Holy Name be blessed," murmured the ancient creature. "Had I not to get up strength in my old body to do all as it should be done? It is not easy in these times."

"Get on!" shrugged the cornet.

As the old woman bent to her task he threw a late loosened wild rose that he had been tormenting in his fingers on to the massive deal box. The others thought he mocked, but his face expressed only weariness; it was near the end of the campaign, everything pleasant had long since been destroyed, all supplies were wanting. . . . When had anyone last tasted a glass of good wine, or a plate of fresh meat? And a pretty, lively girl would have been worth her weight in gold.

Along the road to Cracow by the side of the Vistula the old woman trudged, pushing and pulling her burden. The sky was milky blue, the clouds curdled into heavy flower-like forms; half-rotted rushes bent in the flow of the river. The old creature was nearing the end of her endurance. She was so old, so ill-fed, and then the anxiety, eh, it was nearly too much for a miserable, ancient woman.

"Surely she would never reach the convent on the hill. . . . Eh, but she would, after all these weeks was she to fail now?"

And getting away from those ruffians, too, that was luck. . . . God must be looking after a wretched old woman. May His Holy Name be blessed !” She crossed herself.

But her body and limbs ached, a bitter fluid soured her mouth, an acrid film dimmed her eyes, her heart beat heavily, with reluctance, in a bosom which felt empty. . . . She leant straining against the hand-cart.

She proceeded with great pain along the road to Cracow. She reached the small orchard below the cemetery, she looked up at the lonely chapel of the convent (the soldiers had respected the nuns, it was difficult to know why), and she thought : “I cannot go any further.”

Her rough hands untied the knotted cords of the rude coffin on the truck, and slowly she lifted the lid, after glancing round furtively, and a sprightly young girl, white and plump as a pet rabbit, sat up ; to her dainty nostrils she held a cloth soaked in vinegar to deaden the smell of the dead rats at her feet. She got out stiffly and yawned. The fresh air was delicious. Ever since the soldiers had entered Klatz she had lived in a cupboard, hidden from greedy and covetous eyes, fed on tit-bits, it is true, but still in a cupboard.

The old woman cast away the rats and sank down on her haunches, gazing at her granddaughter with looks of pride, with the timidity of love.

“Listen, my Lisbeth, I have saved you. God be praised. The soldiers do not know you exist, but I can do no more, I am very tired—no one can see us here for the bend of the road—now you must run quickly up to the convent, my darling.”

The girl gazed about her. It was an exquisite evening, pure, cold, azure ; in all the landscape only the convent was dark, sombre.

The old woman’s senses began to fail. She had spent her last forces in pushing her heavy burden.

“Run quickly, my love, my dear, you will be safe with the holy sisters. Kiss me good-bye, Lisbeth. . . . God be praised, I have saved you from the soldiers and their desires !”

The girl glanced at the old woman. No need to kiss her since she was already dead. . . . How ugly she was, sprawling in the frost-bitten grass ! Lisbeth fingered her own soft unblemished bosom and eyed the convent on the hill. She

was hungry, she greedily snatched up a fallen apple and lustfully set her little pointed teeth in it. A crab apple! She pitched it away with disgust; as if her mouth were not already twisted with the vinegar!

The disappointment confirmed her decision; everything was so dull and quiet, the convent so morosely silent, her grandame so repulsive in her sudden twisted death—and the orchard was of crab apples.

She picked up from the truck the overblown rose, licked her red lips slyly and turned back along the Cracow road in search of the fine young cornet whom she had observed through the joint of the roughly-made coffin.

SEAMARK”

QUERY

THOMAS MASTERICK looked dully at the little square of grey sky behind his cell window. He had come to regard it as something of an entity, something almost possessing life. It had a unique talent. It was the only thing in his cell that ever changed. It was a tiny, slow-moving picture in a world that was fixed and motionless. He talked to it in a low, uncomplaining monotone that was cow-like in its contemplative absence of expression. For fifteen years he had been talking to various objects in his cell, reasoning with them vaguely on his one cankering grievance against life.

Not that it was a grievance in the ordinary sense of the word, for there was not a scrap of resentment in the soul of Thomas Masterick. Only a dim perplexity, a puzzlement that refused to submit to elucidation no matter how earnestly he tried to think it out. All he asked of life was an explanation, a reason for the rather unfair thing life had done to him. And he could never quite get down to that explanation. It eluded him persistently. A thousand times he had tried to think down to the real reason. And he had overdone it. Later he came to realize that that was probably why he could no longer think as easily as he used to.

"The trouble is," he admitted to the grey square, "I've been thinking too much. I've had too many thinks. A lot too many thinks. I know I have; because now when I try to have a real good think all I get is a bad dizzy. And these dizzies make my head ache. I've been having too many of them dizzies lately.

"But They can say what They like," he added moodily. "They can say what They like, but They can't say I killed Fred Smith. They can say and say and say. But that don't make out I killed him."

He sat on the edge of his stool and fretfully fingered the leaves of the Bible on the white-scrubbed table.

"Of course the other trouble is," he said. "They think I did. And that's where They've got me. That's what makes it more awkward. It's not much use me saying I didn't, if all the time They tell me I did. They don't believe me any more than I believe Them. They're the most awful crowd of liars I ever met.

"That long, lanky chap in the black gown—he was the worst of the lot. And he was the start of it. Never heard such a lying devil in all my life. Stood up in the middle of the court he did—in the middle of the court, mind you—and deliberately argued that I killed Fred Smith. And there was a hell of a crowd of people there. All listening. They must have heard it. Couldn't have done otherwise.

"And how could *he* know?" he asked with placid wonderment. "Eh? How *could* he know. He wasn't there. He admitted he'd never seen Fred Smith in his life. And he laughed when I asked him. I didn't like that laugh. So stinkin' cocky it was. He admitted he'd never seen me, not till that day They put me in court. So how could *he* know. Yet he stood in the very middle of that court and deliberately made out to the judge how I did it. Stuck at it for four days he did. He was a marvel of a chap. He proved I did do it! Actually proved it. He was a marvel of a chap. Proved it as plain as plain. An absolute marvel of a chap. But the most God-forsaken liar I ever came across in my life.

"And the questions he asked! Couh! You'd have thought he'd known Smithy all his life. Long, lanky devil, he had me tied up all ways. Couldn't move a hand's turn. A fair knockout. He proved me a liar. And a perjuror. And a thief. And then he went and proved I killed Fred Smith. And that was where I had him. Because I never killed Fred Smith. I never saw Fred Smith that day. And if ever I get out of this I'll tell him so, too. Never such a chap in all my born days. Simply wouldn't listen to reason. And now it's raining like the very devil.

"I never told him any lies. I never told him any perjury. And I never nicked anything in my life. Well, not since I left school, anyway. And then for him to stand up in the middle of that court and say the things he did—well! It beats me. Beats me flat.

"And then the judge told me he was going to hang me. I wish to Gord he had now. I wouldn't have been stuck here all this time. Can't make out why he didn't. They was so damn cocksure I'd done it. If I did, why didn't he hang me? If I'd done it, he ought to have hung me, and none of these half-larks. If I didn't do it, then They got no right to have me hung. And They haven't hung me. Looks precious much to me as if They ain't sure I did do it, after all.

"I knew it was going to rain. I knew it this morning. And I said so to Four-eighty-four out in the exercise. 'Ginger,' I said, 'it's going to rain'. 'I don't care a damn,' says Ginger. 'Before dinner,' I said. 'Will it,' says Ginger. 'I'll bet you three hundred thousand pounds it don't.'

"Well, I've got that to come, anyway. That ought to set me up a bit when I get outside. But I don't suppose I'll get it. He won't pay up. He never does. I don't believe he's got three hundred thousand pounds. He's a fly devil is Ginger. Different as anything from Southampton Jack. Southampton Jack betted me a bread ration that I couldn't get him the result of the Derby before supper-time. Of course I could get him the result of the Derby before supper-time. I know the ropes. After all the years I've been here I ought to know the ropes. People who don't know how to get hold of the ropes never ought to go to prison.

"But Ginger don't even pay up on a bread ration. He betted me a bread ration last Sunday that the chaplain would give out hymn number four-eighty-four in the evening. And he didn't. The biggest number he gave out was three hundred and eight. But that only shows how much Ginger knows about religion. Hymn number four-eighty-four is a Christmas hymn. And this ain't Christmas. Not by a long chalk. But he never paid up.

"Southampton Jack paid up next morning. Chucked it in my cell as he was passin' through to the exercise. That's the best of sailors. They're only fly devils sometimes. Mostly they're all right. He's here because he sold a lot of cargo. He says he'd go dotty if they put him in prison without him selling some cargo first. I'm here because I never killed Fred Smith. If I had of killed Fred Smith They'd have hung me.

"Southampton Jack don't believe I killed Fred Smith. Don't believe a word of it. 'What? You?' he said. 'You

killed Fred Smith? Not you, my cocker,' he said. 'You ain't got the guts to kill Fred Smith.' Which was quite right then. But ain't now. I wouldn't think twice about having a lam at that long, lanky devil who stood up in the middle of that court and spouted about me the way he did. It was him that got me lagged, I reckon.

"Sometimes I used to think I'd go dotty when They put me in here without me first killing Fred Smith. But I don't get that way now. All I get is the dizzies. And only when I'm having too many thinks.

"It's funny old Ginger letting himself get caught over his own hymn number. You'd reckon they'd all know their own hymn numbers by the time they've been here a lot of years. When all you've got to read is that Bible and hymn-book, it makes you study 'em a bit. I must have read that Bible down a hundred times. And I'm hanged if I can see what there is in it for people to go raving crazy about. A finer pack of lies I never did see. Nor a bigger lot of twaddle. Unless it was the lot that long lanky devil said about me in that court.

"Most of us know where we are in the hymn-book. Joe Bennett is a Holy Baptism and Tim Cheyne is a 'Piphany. There's a couple of Trinity Sundays down there past the wash-house and all of 'em up there on the top landing are Lents. Me and the lags either side is Ember Days. I've been here years and years and I've never been sung yet. Dan Rafferty gets sung most. He's a Times of Trouble. But the best one is old Three-fifty-one. He's a Matrimony and he's in for a lot of bigamy. I reckon that's damn funny. Thinking about that has got me out a dizzy many a time. Southampton Jack is a Harvest Festival and Tom Earle, who used to be a warder here once, is the only Rogation Day in this block. The other Rogation cells are full of scrubbing gear.

"In my honest opinion I don't believe Fred Smith ever was killed. I believe he took ship that day. It's just the sort of thing he would do. It would be just his delight to land me in the soup. He always said he would. And, my God, he did! Not half he didn't. He always went on sailing ships. And if he suddenly went off on one of those damn long Melbourne cruises of his, he wouldn't be heard of for months and months. More especially if he got bad winds. It would have been all over before he made land. All over and done with. And I'd have been put away prop'ly.

"Southampton Jack might know. He's been to sea long enough. Running east, too. He would tell me if he's heard anything about Smithy since I've been here. If he has, then all I've got to do is to wait till my time's up and go and find him. If I did find him I wouldn't half be able to take the mike out of that cocksure crowd in that court. I'd give 'em a shock all right. I'd make 'em think a bit too, I'll lay.

"And I don't believe that body they had up on that slab was old Freddy Smith at all. Smithy never wore a wrist-watch. He was a sailor. A blue water sailor. And I doubt if his eyesight was good enough to see the time by a wrist-watch. And I'm dead sure he never wore brown boots in his life. I've told the Governor that. And the Chaplain. And the Visiting Justices. But, you see, they didn't know Fred Smith. So they couldn't say. And they wouldn't believe me much, anyway—not after what that long, lanky 'devil said about me.

Rubber-shod feet and a jingle of steel went past his door and up the stairs of the main hall.

"That's old Neversweat," he observed. "Going up to start opening all the doors for dinner. Mutton broth and jackety spuds it'll be to-day. And no duff. Because there's bread. That ought to be all right. And after that we'll all have a bath. And after that Six-thirty-one will scrape the hide off our faces with that razor of his. And then we'll all be all right for Sunday. Six-thirty-one tries to make out he was a real barber before he came here. Couh! I pity his customers. Southampton Jack reckons his customers must have got him put away—if he really was a barber outside. Jack only let him shave him once. Then he put in to be allowed to grow a beard. The Governor laughed like hell when old Neversweat told him why."

The wards of the lock clanged solidly back to the thrust of a ponderous key.

"Basins," said the cookhouse orderly in front of an adequate warder.

Thomas Masterick received his dinner, and the warder poked his head into his cell.

"Number Three-five-four," he said, "you won't go through to exercise after dinner. You'll remain in your cell till the chaplain comes. He will see you this afternoon."

"Will he, sir? All right. Thank you."

The warder looked at him oddly. "You feeling unwell?" he snapped.

"No, sir. I'm all right. Only I think I've got one of my dizzies coming on. I'll be all right, sir, after this bit of broth."

"Well, take my tip when the chaplain comes, and look better than you do now. Or he will be having you trotted along to the infirmary. And you don't want that, do you?"

Masterick looked at him with a childlike incredulity. Of all the desirable heavens in the world of the penal prison the infirmary was the sweetest and best.

"I wouldn't mind going to the infirmary, sir," he said bleakly. "It's very nice in the infirmary."

Regardless of the din of impatient basins and spoons lower down the corridor, the warder stepped right into the cell.

"Say, Three-fifty-four, don't you know what he is going to see you for?" he asked.

Masterick looked up with a spout of fear in his eyes.

"You're going out to-morrow, Three-fifty-four. Didn't you know? Oh, you poor devil!"

That last was because Thomas Masterick had trembled a little, grinned a little, and slid down to the floor with the mutton broth spreading all over his chest.

"My Gawd!" said the warder in the mess-room half an hour later. "Now what the devil was that Number Three-fifty-four living for? Eh? What was he looking forward to? He wasn't even keeping tally of his time. He's the first one I've ever known who couldn't tell you to a second how many *hours* he still had to do—at any time of the day or night."

"Well, you see," Thomas Masterick was informing his basin at that moment, "when I was a Feast and Thanksgiving down there by the doctor's shop, I had it all written up in the whitewash. Got a splinter off the floor boards, I did. And scratched 'em all up in the whitewash. All in bundles of ten. And I scratched one out at each breakfast. Five thousand four hundred and eighty days. That's what they give you for a lifer. And I had 'em all written up.

"The first time I lost count was years and years ago. While we were out in the exercise the maintenance party came round and put fresh whitewash up in the cells. And when I tried to think down to how many I'd done and how many I still had to do, I got a dizzy. And then, just when I had it

nearly all put to rights again by licking off a lot of the new white-wash, they went and changed my cell and made me an Ember Day."

When the chaplain came he found Masterick very quiet and subdued.

"How are you, Number Three-fifty-four?" he asked with kindly austerity. "Well, I hope?—and prepared for your big adventure to-morrow?—I really and sincerely trust we shall never see you again?"

Masterick turned his eyes to the window-patch.

"Well, sir, that all depends on how *They* look at it," he said, a little distantly. "I never quite know what *They*'re going to do with me next. You never ought to have seen me to start with. Not really. Because I never killed Fred Smith. But you know that, don't you? I told you."

"Yes; but I want to know what you are going to do. I can probably help you with your arrangements and help you to get settled down again. Have you any people living to whom you can definitely go?"

"That I can't say, sir. You see, I've been here a tidy long while. And most likely all the people I used to know have died. Perhaps even Fred Smith has died too. A tidy long while I've been here. There's been a war finished and done with since I've been here. And you see that little flag-pole against my bit of window? Well, I always thought that was a flag-pole from the day it first went up, five months back. But that ain't a flag-pole. It's a wireless. So Southampton Jack tells me. I'll have to step very quiet till I pick up that lot of ropes outside again."

"Yes, quite. H'm! A great pity you haven't somewhere definite to go—something definite to do. Perhaps I may be able to exert——"

"Oh, I've got something definite to do all right, sir."

"Oh, you have. Oh, well, of course, that's splendid. Regular employment, is it?"

"Pretty regular, maybe. I want to take the mike out of that cocksure crowd in the court. Because, you see, sir, I never killed Fred Smith."

The chaplain, who had heard that curiously uncomplaining fact reiterated with such steady persistence that he had almost come to believe it himself, made a mental note that Thomas Masterick was a case which would have to be watched pretty closely when he got clear of the prison.

But he needn't have worried. The authorities admitted two months later that their suspicions about Masterick were groundless, and They called off the System. He had harboured no dark animosity against those connected with his trial—a trial which, except for the fact that Thomas Masterick did not kill Fred Smith, was perfectly honest and fair. In fact, he made what they called "quite a good recovery." He picked into the old ruts with deliberate, if painful, endeavour. He got a job down about the docks and set about his task of climbing back into civilization again with calm stolidity. In his case They did not fear for the recidivist.

And yet, a month after that, they freely admitted that it would have been far better for them and for the pomp and vanity of all the legal world if Thomas Masterick had gone straight out, bought a gun and kicked up ten different hells according to his own half-burned-out lights. For the problem that Thomas Masterick flung at them with cold and calculated deliberation when the time was ripe shook the law-officers of the Crown to their finger-tips. He knocked the Law clean out. He left it flat and gasping. He sent every legal mind in the country hectically scampering through old and ancient tomes for light and guidance. But there was no light and guidance. Thomas Masterick had floored them utterly and completely, ludicrously and horribly.

For, three months after his release from prison, and quite by accident, he met the long, lanky devil in the black gown. Counsel for the Crown was also wearing a Knighthood and a K.C. Thomas Masterick was not to know that. Not that it would have mattered to that numb, pulseless soul, even if he had known it.

It was by the "Griffin", where Fleet Street melts into the Strand, and he walked up to him, and he said :

"Hey, mister—you know all that lot of stuff you said about me?"

The K.C. looked down at him shrewdly, and paused for a moment.

"No," he said evenly. "I don't think I do."

"Yes, you remember—that lot of stuff you said about me in the court. To the judge."

The K.C.'s eyes contracted ever so slightly. Somewhere, right away in the back blocks of memory there came a tiny, fleeting picture—a glimpse.

"Oh, yes—I believe I do," he said. "Let me see, now—er—wasn't it—er——"

"Yes, mister; that's what it was. And it was all wrong. All the whole lot of it. I said so at the time, didn't I? And I'm saying so again. I never killed Fred Smith. Not in spite of all what you said. Honest I didn't. And one of these days I'll prove it to you. I'll give you the surprise of your life. And that surprise of everybody else's life who was in that court."

The K.C. drew in a long breath, slowly.

"Ye gods!" he breathed, almost too low to be heard. "So you—you have only just come out, have you?"

"Yes, mister. A couple of months ago."

"Are you working? I mean, have you got anything to do?"

"Yes, mister. Got a regular job. Wapping to Convent Garden. I'm often along here."

"That's a good man." The K.C. slipped a fiver into his hand. "Get yourself a nice new Sunday suit," he said, with a pat on his shoulder.

"Thank you very much, mister." Thomas Masterick pocketed the fiver and hung around. After a moment he said:

"Could you—would you give me a word of advice, too, sir?"

"Certainly, certainly. What's the trouble?"

"Well, supposing I ever found that Fred Smith you said I killed. See, just supposing. How would I have to go about it?"

The K.C. whistled under his breath. "Well!" he said "that would be a poser. Perhaps the best thing you could do would be to come along and see me—here in my chambers. Any of the bobbies here will show you—just here in the Inner Temple."

"Because down in my lodging-house there's a White Star man says he's seen Fred Smith—that's since you said I killed him. It was in 'Frisco, he said, and Fred was running grain in the hog-backs. Got tired o' sail, he did."

"Well, look here, old man, if ever you do manage to get hold of him, you come along and see me. I'll do all I can to help you."

"I wouldn't half be able to take the mike out of that cocky lot of devils, wouldn't I?"

"You would what?"

"Prove 'em a lot of unholy liars."

"You certainly would."

"Not 'arf, I wouldn't," said Thomas Masterick tonelessly. "I'd do more than that, too!"

The K.C. nodded genially and went off with a little pity and a lot of amusement in his heart. He was a good soul in his way, was the K.C., but the acid of the Law ran tart in his veins. His perceptions were too subservient to the dictates of logic.

But it happened that he heard from Thomas Masterick again. On a most propitious day, too. The K.C. was lunching a few legal friends in his chambers. There were three other K.C.s, a former Chancellor, and two judges of the High Court, among them.

The K.C.'s secretary entered and slipped behind his chair. "There's a very persistent fellow outside, sir—a man who calls himself Thomas Masterick. He says you wouldn't turn him away for anything. That it's very important, sir. And that he's got Fred Smith with him!"

"Good God!" said the K.C., swinging round. "Here? He's got Smith here?"

"There is another man with him, sir, yes—frightened-looking man."

"Goodness gracious me!" The K.C. turned to his lunch-party with wild excitement in his eyes.

"Well, if that isn't the most amazing thing!" he cried. "Listen here, you fellows. I've got the most unique course just coming in you've ever sampled in your lives. This is a lunch you'll remember and talk about for years. A real tit-bit. Do you—do you remember that dock murder fifteen years or so ago? Feller named Masterick killed a chap called Fred Smith. I was conducting for the Crown. You, Rumbold, you were judge at the time. He got the black cap—obvious from the first; but the Home Sec. commuted. That, too, was obvious. He——"

Rumbold nodded and the others all intimated their precise memory of the case.

"Well, Masterick is here and Smith is here!" cut in the K.C. with a rush. In a few words he outlined the details of the case to them and the history of his last meeting with Thomas Masterick in Fleet-street.

"Show them in, Plender," he said. And the two men came in—Masterick calm and a little bit suspicious; Fred Smith openly scared.

"Who's all this lot?" demanded Masterick, nodding once at the guests.

"Friends of mine, old chap. Friends who are, I am sure, quite as eager to hear you and help you as I am myself. I doubt if any man in the world ever had such an array of legal talent—ha, ha, that's one for you, Rumbold—to help him as you."

"I don't want any help," said Masterick flatly. He dragged Smith farther into the room. "I've had a hell of a hunt to find him," he announced. "And when I did find him he wouldn't come along—not till I told him about you, mister. I ain't got much to say—I'm afraid I've got a dizzy coming on; that's what comes of trying to think too hard. But the way I look at it is this. You were a cocksure crowd of devils in that court, weren't you? Wouldn't listen to reason, no ways. I told you a hundred times I never killed Fred Smith, but you wouldn't have it; you was that damned cocky about it. You lagged me for fifteen years for murdering that swipe there. And I hadn't done it. But I've done the punishment for it, blast you!"

"And now"—he suddenly pulled out a gun and shot Fred Smith clean through the heart where he stood—"now I've done the murder for which I've already been punished," he thundered. "And what the hell are you going to do about it?"

LOUIS GOLDING

He Fought a Ghost

HE FOUGHT A GHOST

THIS is the story of one of the most luridly exciting prize-fights in history. It is true that the fight involved fewer pennies than the Carpentier, Dempsey or Tunney affairs involved pounds. . . . It is true that the spectators numbered their hundreds rather than their tens of thousands. Yet the fact remains that for lurid excitement none of the championship affairs in recent history can begin to compare with that strange bout between Deaf Burke and Samuel O'Rourke.

They were both Irishmen by origin as their names indicate. But on that day in New Orleans they were England versus the States, the Old World versus the New World. They were also a living man versus an unsleeping ghost.

I said that the excitement was *lurid*. I mean precisely that. It was not the glorious excitement of pure boxing, such excitement as very nearly lifted the scalp off at the heroic contests of Bendigo versus Ben Caunt, or Tom Sayers versus John Heenan. It was the excitement not of the bare fists, but of the bared knife. It was pure, and perhaps impure, melodrama.

There were only three rounds fought that day in New Orleans. That is a fairly respectable number compared with certain hectically advertised modern bouts which have come to an end in not many more seconds. But it was a miserable number then, when those gigantic creatures sometimes went on pummelling at each other for many more than a hundred rounds. Deaf Burke himself, much earlier in his career, took a certain Bill Fitzmaurice through it for no fewer than a hundred and sixty-six rounds. Yet, compared with those ultra-violet three rounds in New Orleans, the affair with Fitzmaurice was about as exciting as a hard-boiled egg.

Who was this Deaf Burke? And what on earth was he doing in New Orleans? For it is a long way from the Strand, and there were no airplanes or fast liners then.

Who was he? He was perhaps the most engaging of the bare-knuckle fighters, and the most gallant. He made his living as a lad by helping the grand folk to land from their pinnaces on the Strand water-stairs. He saved more than one life from drowning in those days, and ran away from the scene of the rescue as if he had done something he was acutely ashamed of.

So it was something in the nature of a tragic paradox that this gentle pugilist should be involved in a fight which ended fatally, his fight with the big Irishman, Simon Byrne, though Byrne himself had once after a fight been tried for manslaughter. It seemed almost as if Nemesis had appointed that the grim lot which had been dealt out by Byrne should be dealt out to him, too, in due season.

But it was a scurvy trick on the part of Nemesis to choose for her minister so simple and jovial a creature as Burke. There was something childlike about him from beginning to end. He talked a queer childish language of his own. He cavorted up and down the ring before his fights started, like a huge baby.

It was ironical that he never behaved more clownishly than on the fateful day of the meeting with Simon Byrne. He drove off to the ringside in an open carriage, with his face daubed red and white, like a circus clown's. During the whole journey he grimaced, he guffawed, he did capers, as if he were on his way to pour out tea for the children at a curate's party.

When he got into the ring he drew forth an enormous cigar from nowhere, like a conjuror, and started puffing away at it. His backers nearly had heart failure, till it was found out that it was only a toy cigar. Then he thrust his arm through his rival's and marched him up and down the ring, making funny faces at him and everyone else.

Little did he suspect that the next occasion upon which he was to see Simon Byrne, he would see him but dimly for the tears which filled his eyes.

There was a bird of ill-omen that flapped his wings that day over the ringside. But Deaf Burke looked like some very different sort of bird as he pranced up and down in his queer fighting togs.

"He wore green baize drawers," writes the chronicler, "profusely trimmed with yellow braid, and decorated with

flying knots of yellow ribbon at the knees, while his calves were cased in a pair of bright striped worsted stockings, and his feet in laced high-lows."

The "high-lows" must have looked very dashing as the feet they shod danced and pranced about the ring. In fact, Burke must have looked very dashing altogether despite his bull-dog face, his high Irish cheek-bones, his bulby nose. He was in grand condition. His muscles rippled under the firm satin skin. He tapered down from broad shoulders to slim flanks in the fashion that the ancient sculptors immortalized in bronze and marble. There was a grin on his gruff face when he and his man toed the scratch. The phantom of it came back again and again during that infinite century of rounds.

In the last round of all there was a grin on the face of Simon Byrne. No one knew it was the grin the face of a dying man assumes when the skull shows through under the skin, as if a supernatural light is switched on and quickly switched off again.

Blood was drawn from both in the first round, but Burke treated it like a conjuror's trick, as if it were coloured paper issuing from his nose. Byrne's blue eyes were like plaques of grey steel. In the fourth Byrne's fist came up like a flatiron on the back of Burke's skull. If it had been the front there would have been no more fight. In the fifth an uppercut from Byrne's right rattled the Londoner's teeth like castanets. "How's that?" asked Byrne's second. "Very good, mister!"

Simon Byrne fell at length. There was no bringing him round now, however crafty the seconds might be. Deaf Burke won. But he did not remain the winner long. Death was the winner a few days later. Death stole from Simon Byrne's brow the few laurels that Deaf Burke had spared him. And not even Burke was brave enough to go down into the dark places to dispute the matter.

This then was Deaf Burke, whom on a certain day we see stripped in the ring in New Orleans, with the bared knives all about him, flashing evilly in the strong sun. And how came he then to New Orleans? That question remains to be answered. And the answer is Simon Byrne.

The oracles of the ring do not give the same answer at all. Jem Ward, they say, the living champion—it was he who was responsible for Deaf Burke's journey to America.

I do not believe it. It was a ghost that sent him there. For the oracles of the ring—such stalwart scribes as Pierce Egan and Vincent Dowling—were grand judges of a cross-buttock throw and a left hook to the point of the jaw. But they were less subtle judges of the souls of men. It is not enough to say that mere pique or mere greed sent Burke across the waste of weltering waters. That is to misunderstand completely the sort of person he was—a child, half comical, half pitiable, cabined within a shaggy bruiser's body.

Doubtless Jem Ward was irritating enough. Jem Ward was still the official champion of the time, though why that was so is a little mysterious, for he had formally renounced the championship four years previously. It was none other than Simon Byrne whom Jem Ward had beaten for the belt, so it seemed reasonable for Burke to claim it when he beat that unfortunate creature.

The moment Burke did so, however, Ward made a snatch for the belt as if it were a baby about to fall into a boiler of hot water. He would fight, said Ward, for no sum less than £500 a side. This was sore news for Burke. He seemed as likely to become Shah of Persia as to find £500. At length Ward was induced to go down an octave. He would fight for £300 against £200. After strenuous efforts Burke found the money, only to find Ward piping up again the earlier shriller tune—£500 a side or no fight.

No wonder Burke was disgruntled. He tried to get matched up with two other hefty gentlemen, but there, too, nothing came of it. So he went wandering from London to Birmingham, Birmingham to Liverpool.

And all the time a ghost went padding after him. A ghost with half its ghostly face smashed in, and its ghostly fists mashed to a pulp.

Jem Ward would not fight Deaf Burke. Young Langan would not fight Deaf Burke.

They were living men, and he was not afraid of them. But Simon Byrne challenged him to fight again and again. He jeered and leered at him in dark entries and bright patches of moonlight. But Simon Byrne was dead, and Deaf Burke was woefully afraid.

So the idea of America came to him. "P'raps 'e won't follow me dere!" muttered Deaf Burke. "All dat way across de big waters!"

And Deaf Burke set sail for America, with the green swell before him and the pale wake of foam behind. The seagulls dipped and swooped about his head. "Good-bye, Simon Byrne," cried out Deaf Burke. "Ho! Ho!" laughed Simon Byrne. "You've not done with me yet!"

The living boxers of America were as chary of putting their fists up against the Cockney Irishman as their colleagues in England had been. He waited about in New York. He went careering off to Philadelphia. He came empty-handed back to New York again.

They all disapproved strongly of Deaf Burke as a boxer. So when the manager of an institution called Conklin's Hall offered to show him to the public as a statue, Deaf Burke, who was getting a little hungry by this time, accepted the engagement.

He was a queer sort of Valentino or Chevalier to capture the heart of the down-town maidens. But he did. His "Achilles throwing the discus" was irresistible. As the "Dying Gladiator" he died in "five celebrated positions." He went on dying and throwing the discus and defying the lightning for some weeks.

But he began to get more and more restive. Among the young women and small boys who paid their dime to see him he sometimes saw a creature, with a smashed face and a pulped fist, that over-towered them all. He would turn round suddenly, as if he expected a lunge into the kidneys.

"I must get quit out of dis 'ere!" he said to himself. "Dis ain't no good for me at all, it ain't. It gets me creepy!"

There was only one way, he realised, to lay the shadow that padded after him along the sunlit length of Broadway or into the dark purlieu of the Bowery. He must get into the ring again. His blood must tingle again with the glory of battle. The air must resound again with the slap of bare knuckles on cheek and rib. The crowd must roar again: "Bravo, the Deaf 'Un! Well hit, Deaf Burke!"

And then he read the challenge of Samuel O'Rourke in a New Orleans paper.

But to Deaf Burke it was more than the challenge of Samuel O'Rourke. It was the challenge of O'Rourke's dead countryman, Simon Byrne.

They warned Deaf Burke that the ferocious Irishman had sworn to have his blood for the blood of Simon Byrne. They warned him again when he read O'Rourke's swaggering challenge to fight any man living for a thousand dollars a side. But they could not hold him back. He packed up his traps and went. But it was not Samuel O'Rourke he went to meet. It was to try conclusions, once and for all, with a more silent and more formidable adversary.

At last Deaf Burke and Samuel O'Rourke came face to face in a drinking-shop by the waterside. O'Rourke's was not a pleasant face, nor was Burke's either at that moment. O'Rourke started blustering. He'd not strip for one cent less than a thousand dollars, begad he wouldn't.

It so happened that two adventurous gentlemen were taking a dram or two in the saloon at that moment. Perhaps they had taken two or three. The fact remains that they each brought forth 25 dollars then and there, and laid them down among the spillings of rum and absinthe.

"What do you say to that, Sam?" they wanted to know. O'Rourke's gaze wandered between Burke's colossal fists and the sweet heap of dollar-bills. The dollar-bills had it. A wetness came up along his lower lip. "Done!" said he, and licked his lips.

The fight was fixed for a fortnight later. It came off, and both the principals were there—which was a strange thing. For so many efforts were made on Deaf Burke's life that you might have thought he was a pretender to a throne and not a mere low-born bruiser from the Thames embankment.

His backers and seconds, however, formed themselves into a bodyguard which in later days the illustrious Mr. Al Capone transported with him on all his journeys, whether he went to the corner of the block to buy a newspaper or to the coast of Florida to buy a picture-palace.

So Deaf Burke survived and duly stepped into the ring on a blazing afternoon in May. The ring had been set up at the fork of the Bayou roads over against the rolling Mississippi. It was surrounded by the gentlest gang of ewe lambs that ever gathered to witness a fight in the history of prize-fighting. If it had suddenly occurred to those ewe lambs to set to washing themselves clean of their sins, there would not have been water enough in the long, deep Mississippi to do the job.

It was a grand, snarling, roaring, screaming, spitting

company of desperadoes, consisting largely (says the chronicler) of "Creoles, Half-breeds, French gamblers, Yankee sharps, Irish roughs."

All Ireland had sent its delegates from Cork to Londonderry. Had not Deaf Burke slaughtered their broth of a boy, Simon Byrne, and in cold blood, too? He had eluded them all these last two weeks. To-day he would not elude them. It was not the bare knuckles of Samuel O'Rourke they put their trust in. What were these pistols for, these bowie knives, these bludgeons and slug-shot?

As was said earlier, from the point of view of mere fighting, the Burke-O'Rourke affair does not rank high in the annals of prize-fighting. There were only three rounds fought. O'Rourke thrust in a few sharp ones to the ribs. Deaf Burke got over some of those great swinging smashes which had done so much damage on the other side of the water.

But the sight of those moustaches bristling, those lips twisting, those knives glinting, must have taken a little polish off his style. The fight was officially between Deaf Burke and Samuel O'Rourke, but O'Rourke's second, a brisk gentleman named Micky Carson, took up a great deal of the lime-light. In the second round he crept up behind the Englishman and shoved him into O'Rourke's arms. O'Rourke promptly threw him and fell on top of him.

Deaf Burke was displeased. He informed Mr. Carson he would knock him down if he did such a thing again. Mr. Carson said that if Mr. Burke tried to knock him down he would slit his gizzard. Mr. Carson meant it. Unusual as it is for seconds in a prize-fight to carry a knife or a pistol, in addition to a sponge and a towel, Mr. Carson carried both a knife and a pistol.

In the third round Deaf Burke was more than displeased. He was angry. He knocked out several of Samuel O'Rourke's teeth. Mr. Carson thought this very unmannerly. He crept forward, his hand on his knife-hilt. Deaf Burke spotted him out of the corner of his eye. With the bellow of an outraged bull he hurled himself upon Mr. Carson. Mr. Carson slid nearly to the ground.

What happened then was confused and confusing. Ireland

surged as one man upon the ropes and cut them. Then it surged upon Deaf Burke and tried to do the same to him.

"Come on!" roared Burke, hurling his fists about him like flails. "Come on, you lumps."

And then he saw a face among the other faces, paler than the rest. It was the face of no living man. His eyes grew thick as glass. His hands fell to his sides. The knives circled in the air about his head.

Then a voice, the voice of a friend, cried into his ear beseechingly: "Pull yourself together, man! They'll slit your throat! Run! Run!"

He blinked. He had a sudden poignant vision of the Thames, how broad it flows at Westminster, and the lights upon it. He had a vision of a girl he knew at Poplar.

He turned his huge back upon the ghost. Like a buffalo charging, he butted his way through the mob. The roughs fell like skittles before his onset.

A hundred yards down the Bay, a road a hand thrust the handle of a bowie-knife into his hand. "Take this!" said the voice.

The howling mob was at his heels. Fifty yards further a stranger leaped from his horse and bade Burke leap on to it. "God bless you," said the stranger, "and get to hell out of it!"

Hell-for-leather rode Deaf Burke into New Orleans. A strange horseman he looked, naked to the navel, those green baize drawers below it, with the flying knots of yellow ribbon at the knees. He fled to the theatre owned by the good Mr. Caldwell, one of his backers.

There he lay low for several days, until it was considered safe to move him, at dead of night, with a few old sacks about his shoulders, down to the water-side.

They smuggled him aboard a steamship going north up the Mississippi. The horn hooted. The paddle churned up the black water. Deaf Burke threw off his sacks, threw out his chest, and walked over to the stern. Behind, fainter and fainter twinkled the lights of New Orleans. Beneath, the bubbles choked and chuckled.

They broke and spread. They joined their edges and made a great pale face. The face they made was the face of Simon Byrne. A watery eye winked up at him out of the dimness.

ANTHONY GITTINS

The Third Performance

THE THIRD PERFORMANCE

AFTER its initial performance at the Paris Opera House, seven years ago, the awesome "Symphonie de la Morgue Souterraine" was fervidly acclaimed as a masterpiece and, without doubt, the finest work of its famous composer, Feodor Sarbecoff.

Two months later it was played in Berlin, and there received with the same vehement enthusiasm. Since then it had never been heard again, and Sarbecoff had retired to the seclusion of his home in Poland.

Now, ordinarily, save by musicians, this would have been regarded as quite an inconsequent matter. But a startling tragedy at each performance brought the symphony into front-page prominence all over the world.

Fully to realise the peculiar atmosphere that surrounded these tragedies it is necessary to know something of the uncanny story on which the symphony was based.

Its dominant vein, which is one of harsh, unrelenting mockery, is eerily portrayed by the music.

In a vasty subterranean cave, stretching away into infinite cones of blackness, are myriads of earthy coffins containing the dead. It is the end of the world; cataclysmic confusion has doomed justice in Heaven; the Devil sits in judgment.

The First Movement visualises this weird and gruesome scene. The Second, reminiscent in manner of the "Danse Macabre," represents the Awakening of the Dead. In the Third, the Court of Pandemonium assembles.

Not until the Fourth and final Movement does the Devil appear. On the Judgment Seat he declares that, since human beings have always desired to live as a community, it is but just that they should be judged as a community. Therefore only one soul will be chosen for judgment, and on the verdict will depend the eternal fate of all souls which have had their

being upon earth. This solemn pretence of equity is, of course, a derisive sham.

The restless, strained nature of the music is now suspended, and a harp solo is introduced to picture the terrible delusion of Hope in the Living Dead.

Here is cruel irony. The passage is worked up from a quiet, peaceful tempo to a pitch of frenzy. . . It ceases. A second's quivering silence, and then from the full orchestra comes a hideous, evil discord, dispelling every vestige of hope as the Devil pronounces eternal damnation. It is the inquisitorial "Torture of Hope," but immeasurably more fearful.

Then follows the wailing and moaning of the Accursed as they shuffle and fade into the darkness. So intensely vivid is Sarbecoff's music that one critic described it as "having the very smell of the grave-clothes in its composition."

This was the story in outline. It was printed more fully on the programmes at both performances.

And the tragedies were these.

At the Paris Opera House, before a packed audience, the solo harpist collapsed immediately after playing the harp passage in the Fourth Movement. He died a moment later, with a fearful stare in his eyes and clots of froth on his lips.

At the second performance, in Berlin, almost an identical tragedy took place. On the very instant that the full orchestral chord followed his harp solo, Carl Heym fell heavily forward against his instrument. He was picked up dead, with his face marked in the same ghastly manner.

Since that date the Symphony had not been played again, and nothing was heard or seen of Sarbecoff until seven years afterwards, when he visited Rome.

One of the few people to recognise him there was Paul Duvivier, perhaps the most celebrated harpist then living. They were both staying at the same hotel, and shortly after Duvivier had bridged acquaintance with the composer he referred to the Symphony.

At first Sarbecoff was decidedly reticent on the subject, but Duvivier, who was young and roundly assertive, soon drew him on by provocation.

"Of course, M'sieur, it was auto-suggestion that was responsible for those so unhappy incidents," he said. "Francois Vauban, who played at the Paris Opera, had a most excitable

imagination. I knew him personally. And Heym also I had the honour of meeting. He too was—how shall I say—susceptible to atmosphere? Knowledge of the gruesome story in both cases . . .”

“It was not auto-suggestion, my friend,” softly interrupted the old composer. “Neither was it coincidence, as many people thought.”

“Then how do you explain it, M’sieur?”

Sarbecoff tapped his thin, nervous fingers on the arm of the chair, staring intently at the younger man.

“Do you, M’sieur Duvivier, believe in the supernatural?”

The other scornfully waved his hand. “Surely, M’sieur, you are not superstitious?” he asked almost incredulously.

“So superstitious, indeed,” replied Sarbecoff, “that I am afraid of that Symphony. Frightened of it. It is my most terrible conception.”

“You think, then, that an interruption might take place again if it were performed a third time?”

“I know it,” said the composer with slow emphasis. “And it would be the same . . . interruption.”

Duvivier hesitated, momentarily impressed by the rigid conviction in the man’s voice. He recalled stories that he had heard of Sarbecoff. His only religion was said to be demonism, and all his compositions were veined with melancholia and a morbid romanticism. He occupied in the world of music the place that Poe held in the world of letters. His work was so individual that even unmusical people could recognise his music after they had heard any one *opus* of his. Its character was always weird and awesome . . . wild . . . shuddering. . . .

“M’sieur,” said Duvivier, “it has ever been my regret that circumstances prevented me from hearing the Symphony on either occasion. But I beseech you to have it performed again, for the sake of the world which lives by fine music. And if I may be permitted to be the harpist . . .”

“The Symphony will never be heard again,” said Sarbecoff, shaking his head.

“I do assure you, m’sieur, that nothing but fevered imagination caused the deaths of Heym and Vauban. Knowledge of the strange story would not affect me. I am not at all sensitive to atmosphere.”

When Sarbecoff smiled his mouth—a livid, crimson gash

in an ivory-hued face—drooped sardonically at the corners. He did so now, for the first time in the conversation.

“Can you be so sure of that?” he asked, after a pause.

“Perfectly sure, M’sieur. My mind is not so credible, so nervous. Strange things never influence me. I tell you, I am not susceptible to fancies. As for the supernatural and superstition . . .” He snapped his fingers and laughed.

“So you really believe that only imagination was responsible my friend?”

“Certainly. What else?” Duvivier grew impatient. “Come, come, M’sieur! You must allow the Symphony to be performed again, and be so good as to let me play the part to convince you.”

There followed a long argument, in which it was very evident that Sarbecoff was deeply afraid of some sinister quality in his queer work. Only he knew the peculiar circumstances in which it had been composed, and by which it had been inspired. And these, for a reason of his own, he never divulged.

At length, however, he gave in to Duvivier’s insistent appeals.

“But only on certain conditions, M’sieur Duvivier,” he said.

“And what are they, M’sieur?”

“If the Symphony is to be performed again, no member of the orchestra must have heard it before. And it must not be played in Berlin or Paris. If you agree”—he shrugged and spread his hands—“I leave you to make all necessary arrangements.”

One evening, some months later, the Albert Hall was packed to its utmost limits for a concert in which Sarbecoff’s “Symphonie de la Morgue Souterraine” was heavily billed.

Every seat had been taken within two weeks from the opening of the booking. For when the announcements appeared, stating that the work would be conducted as on both former occasions by Sarbecoff himself, with Paul Duvivier, the celebrated harpist, taking part, minds went back seven years.

The Press recapitulated the circumstances of the first two performances, the mysterious deaths, the subsequent years of silence. And the general attitude of anticipation was

rather gruesomely emphasised by the fact that Duvivier's photograph was published more frequently than Sarbecoff's.

In spite of himself, the young French harpist was worried. At first he laughed at his fears, then he became annoyed as they swelled to greater volume.

Previously it had seemed such a small matter, but realising that there was everywhere a feeling of morbid expectancy he became faintly apprehensive. Not that he believed for one moment in the supernatural, of course. That was ridiculous. So was superstition. He frowned on himself for allowing such thickcoming fancies to persist in his thoughts. Certainly the music was terribly weird, but the informality of the rehearsals counteracted the atmosphere to some extent.

At last the evening came. There was not a soul in the vast audience who did not know practically every detail connected with the history of the Symphony.

It was placed at the end of the programme. When Sarbecoff appeared, and bowed in a stiff, curt manner, there was heavy applause. Equally loud, so it seemed, was the acclamation that had greeted Duvivier.

The composer, who had no baton, waited for quite a considerable time after it had ceased.

Then he raised his hands . . .

Very strange were the opening bars. Almost from the beginning the great audience fell under the influence of the music. It was insidious, sinuously pervasive. They connected the story with the music as it proceeded.

Surely this was the most eerie of all his eerie works . . .

The Second Movement came and passed. Then the Third Movement . . .

With the opening of the Fourth and final Movement the nervous tension passing through the audience could almost be felt. The music became louder in its evil intensity . . . Suddenly it broke off and the gentle, plaintive notes of a harp rippled quietly through the great hall.

All eyes were turned on Duvivier. He was playing as in a dream. His eyes were fixed on some point in the audience. Then the passage grew more restless ; fear crept in. Duvivier still stared, plucking feverishly at the strings and beginning to sway a little, unasily . . .

It was magnificent playing, but he looked as if he were wholly unconscious of everything around him. Then he

came to the long run which led up to the climax, interpreted it with an agitated, clawing energy which became a frenzy. . . .

A second's lull, a deathlike silence, and then the crash of that great discord, like a vile jeer of mockery. . . .

Above the sound went up a rending, hysterical cry from the audience. Women screamed, men stood up, all gazing fixedly at one spot. . . . The music ceased.

Duvivier was lying sprawled on the floor, face downwards.

Feodor Sarbecoff sat by a man's bed in a London nursing-home. The patient, who was Paul Duvivier, had not long since recovered from twenty-seven hours of unconsciousness.

"Yes," murmured Duvivier, fingering the sheets. "There *is* something terrible in the Symphony, M'sieur. I felt as if . . . as if I were in the grip of some Power . . . as if my soul were not my own."

The composer made an apologetic gesture. "Had I known that you were so impressionable, my friend, I would not have gone even so far as I did. But you assured me that . . ."

"No, no! It was not imagination! I tell you it was something fearful!"

"The newspapers," said Sarbecoff with apparent inconsequence, "were very indignant. So were many . . ."

"Newspapers? Indignant?"

"They accused me of playing a joke on the public."

"A joke? I don't understand."

"Of course not. Permit me to explain. During the seven years that I stayed in Poland I composed another Symphony, rather similar in form. It also had a harp solo in the Fourth Movement. But it was not associated with any grim subject."

The man in the bed stared, raising himself feebly on one elbow.

"You see," said Feodor Sarbecoff, "the Symphony in which you played was *not* the 'Symphonie de la Morgue Souterraine.' If it had been . . ."

He left the sentence unfinished.

HAL PINK

The Screaming Plant

THE SCREAMING PLANT

“LOOK !”

Barker held out a tiny cardboard box for my inspection. Inside, on a nest of cotton-wool, was a large, shrivelled seed, similar in appearance to a dead and curled-up maggot.

“What is it ?” I asked.

“That’s what I am wondering,” smiled Barker, “but the man from whom I got it said that it was a genuine mandrake seed !”

He made this pronouncement with such marked emphasis and enthusiasm that my interest was quickened, though I was still no wiser. Barker, my lifelong friend, is a botanist of repute, the discoverer of several new varieties of orchid, and his researches have led him through many lands, to the fringes of civilisation and beyond. He had recently returned from an expedition to the Matto Grosso forests of Brazil, and after a re-union dinner and two seats at a cinema to celebrate the occasion, we were smoking a final pipe of tobacco in his cosy study.

“And what on earth is a mandrake ?” I handed back the box.

For answer, Barker leaned over the arm of his chair, jerked open the glass door of a bookcase, and selected a battered volume from the jumble of books on the shelves. Opening it, he read aloud the words “*Nomen Herbae Mandragora. . .*”

“This,” said Barker, tapping the book with his pipe-stem, “is a herbal book much prized 500 years ago when housewives brewed the families’ medicines from plants and flowers gathered in the fields. It contains the legend of the mandrake. I will not weary you with the tedious and badly-phrased Latin version given here, but the illustration will give you the idea at once.”

He handed the book to me. It was dated 1433, and looked

its age. The calfskin binding was worn into holes; the leaves were yellowed with the light of five centuries; and the crude type, irregular composition and faded brown ink combined to render the pages more picturesque than readable.

The illustration of the mandrake was a rough drawing showing a figure with the body, arms, and legs of a man, but with roots instead of hands and feet and a cluster of leaves where the head should have been. A small dog was depicted, attached by a cord to the mandrake's right leg.

"There you have it," said Barker. "An early artist's idea of the human plant of the legend. The mandrake was supposed to be a plant with human form and the voracity of a carnivorous animal, which reached out with its root-tentacles to seize unsuspecting herb-gatherers and crush them to death, gaining strength from their blood. As uprooting a mandrake was believed to be tantamount to committing suicide, dogs were employed for this purpose, as the drawing shows."

"What nonsense!" I laughed. "Do you actually believe that such a monstrosity existed?"

"Why not?" replied Barker. "Why shouldn't the missing link between man and the sub-world be a plant? Plants have always stood upright and never moved on their bellies like animals. And there do exist in the tropics to-day jungle plants with tentacles and suckers which catch small flies."

"Well, why not try to germinate your so-called mandrake seed?" I suggested, laughingly. "And see what happens."

To my surprise, he took me seriously. "It would need colossal heat," he mused, "moist heat . . . swamp heat . . ."

A sudden scratching noise at the door interrupted him.

Barker's face lit up.

"That's Tom."

Tom was his greatest pet, a magnificent Persian cat, which stayed under my charge many times when its master was off on a journey to the wilds. As Barker opened the door it stalked in, purring with delight.

"He's been hunting rats in the cellar, as usual," said Barker, stooping to make a fuss of his pet, "and now he wants his milk."

A month passed. I had been very busy, and had seen little of Barker since our night of celebration. Then he telephoned to me.

"Can you come round here?" His usually calm voice was quivering with excitement. "Something incredible to show you! That mandrake seed——"

"*What?* It has germinated?" I gasped.

"Yes—the application of terrific heat—it is sprouting in my cellar—come and see——"

I slammed the telephone receiver on its hook and ran for my hat.

Barker greeted me at the door with shining eyes. He was elated as a schoolboy.

"Man, you ought to see it! As big as my arm, with shoots, tentacles, suckers and everything! Do you realise what this means? It is the greatest botanical discovery of all time! At one stroke thousands of years have been wiped off the calendar! Here is a plant which in history has only existed in legend, which vanished from this earth before primitive men became articulate—alive—growing—in my cellar——"

I caught his infection. As eager to see the phenomenon as he was to display it, I hurried after him to the cellar. It was the bottom cellar of three, far underground, and as we descended the stairs a cloud of hot steam swirled to meet us.

"Moist heat," explained Barker. "Hot steam and electric arc-lights. I had a copper boiler from the wash-house installed down here, and it has been boiling away for three weeks now. Water is fed into the boiler through a hose-pipe, and I build up the fire every four hours. The steam gives the temperature and humidity of the swamps in which these plants lived. The electric arcs provide light and additional warmth."

We reached the bottom cellar. It was difficult to breathe in the super-heated atmosphere, but I peered through the mist of steam and there, swaying in a bed of soft, oozy mud, was the strangest plant I had ever set eyes on.

I said *swaying*. I mean it. Although no wind blew in the cellar, to cause motion, the plant writhed slowly from side to side! It was, as Barker had said, about the length of his arm in height. The stem was thick and two thick branches with a mass of thin roots at their ends, stuck out near the leaf cluster at the top. It was white in colour, but the stem of the plant was blotched with patches of light-grey fungus.

"You see?" said Barker. "True, there are no legs such

as were shown in the illustration, but there are arms, and tentacles. Look closer. You will see the suckers at the end of each tentacle."

I looked. Flower-shaped suckers there were indeed, opening and shutting like so many gasping mouths waiting for food. I shuddered. There was something indescribably evil, loathsome, about the creature.

"See! It seems to be growing every minute!" cried Barker, clutching me by the arm. The plant was swelling and then subsiding, swelling again, and each time it seemed to increase its stature.

I could stand it no longer. "Come on, let us get out of this!" I said thickly; "this heat is overpowering."

He was loath to leave, and at last I had to take him by the arm and literally drag him out of that cellar. The sweet air up above was good after that sweltering oven below.

"Isn't it a beauty?" said Barker, enthusiastically. "Why, it is the greatest——"

"Yes, yes, I know—I agree," was my hasty rejoinder, but though I tried to change the subject he kept me talking about that foul thing down in the cellar for nearly an hour before I left.

For two days after that I tried to forget about Barker's cellar and the plant that was sprouting there, but always the Thing came uppermost in my thoughts. It was on the morning of the third day that it began to worry me. I could not concentrate on my work, for mentally I was visualising that writhing creature in its artificially-created tropical swamp, and Barker peering lovingly at it through the miasma. . . . Barker building up the boiler fires. . . . Barker tending the arc-lights like an acolyte at the altar of an evil god. . . . Barker reaching out to touch the tentacles. . . .

I went to his house. I had to go. Something stronger than reason, something bigger than myself forced me to go.

There was no reply to my knock. Was he out? I thundered at the door. I went through the garden gate and round to the back of the house, shouting his name.

At last I broke in a window. Never in a sane moment would I have done such a thing, but the strange absence of my friend had crystallised my vague misgivings into one overwhelming fear for his safety.

I entered by the window, calling his name.

"Where are you?" I shouted. But the words came echoing back to me, mockingly.

The door leading to the cellar was open. I dashed down the steps. Then——

"*Help!*"

Barker's voice. My heart was pounding like a trip-hammer as I thundered down the last flight of steps and into the hot mist.

There was Barker, in the farthest corner of the cellar, crouching against the wall, and looming over him was that dreadful Thing, now grown to the size of a man.

A low humming noise filled the air. The plant was waving from side to side, its tentacle arms outstretched towards the cowering man. On the bed of mud was a mangled heap of fur—Tom, the Persian cat, crushed to death.

"For God's sake, get an axe!" cried Barker, as he saw me. "Quickly!"

I turned and ran. In one of the upper cellars I found a short-handled chopper and a garden spade. Armed with these, I dashed below again. Only just in time. The roots of the arms were reaching out towards my friend, nearer and nearer, the suckers dripping with a wet, sticky mass. Barker gave a despairing shout, and——

Whack! I brought down the blade of the spade with all my force on the monster's trunk.

It screamed.

Shrill as the shriek of a syren was that cry of agony.

One set of suckers had already fastened on Barker's shoulder, but now they fell away as the plant writhed backwards towards me.

I struck again and again, and still the shrill screams of the Thing rent the air. I tossed the short chopper to Barker, and reaching out he slashed at the tentacles.

It took us five minutes to cut it to pieces. When it was safe for him to move, Barker came round the bed of mud and joined me, wiping the sweat from his face. He was trembling.

"By Heaven, you only just got here in time!" he gasped. "I've been down here four hours. Came down early this morning to see to the fires, and was amazed to see how the plant had grown overnight. I was round in that corner, examining one of the arc-lights, when poor Tom came down.

I had shut him out of the cellars while this—this Thing was growing. He stood over there—the nearest point to it—and it seemed to me that the cat was hypnotised by the plant, for he made no move as the tentacles came slowly down towards him. Then—it got him.”

He shuddered at the memory.

“Before I could snatch him clear, it had crushed him with its root-fingers, and the suckers were drinking the blood. That was what it wanted—blood. Blood gave it power. Even as I stood there, astounded, it grew and grew, and the humming noise developed. I realised then that I was trapped. I could not get past. The blood of the cat had given just the impetus it needed to become dangerous. I was cut off. And I remained cut off until your arrival. You saved my life——”

“Don’t let’s talk about it,” I muttered, and hurried him upstairs for a stiff glass of whisky.

We sprayed the battered stump and the hacked pieces of the mandrake, if such it was, with acid, and burnt the foul thing into oblivion. Barker locked up that bottom cellar after the mud and the apparatus had been removed. The terrible death of his pet cat hurt him deeply, and when last I went to see him I noticed that the faded old volume containing the legend of the mandrake had disappeared from the shelves of his bookcase.

HOLLOWAY HORN

The Old Man

THE OLD MAN

MARTIN THOMPSON was not a desirable character. He possessed a clever, plausible tongue, and for years past had lived, with no little success, on his wits. He had promoted doubtful boxing competitions and still more doubtful sweepstakes. He had been a professional backer, in which capacity he had defrauded the bookies; again, a bookmaker who had swindled his "clients." There was more cunning than imagination in his outlook, but, within his limits, he possessed a certain distorted ability.

He was known to his intimates as Knocker Thompson, and as such had a surprisingly wide reputation. In outward appearance he was a gentleman, for long experience had taught him to avoid the flashy and distinctive in dress. Indeed, his quiet taste had often proved a valuable business asset.

Naturally, his fortunes varied, but he was usually more or less in funds. As Knocker sometimes said in his more genial moments: "For every mug that dies there's ten others born."

Funds were rather low, however, on the evening when he met the old man. Knocker had spent the early part of the evening with two acquaintances in an hotel near Leicester Square. It was a business meeting, and relations had been a little strained; opinions had been freely expressed which indicated a complete lack of confidence in Knocker, and an unmistakable atmosphere had resulted. Not that he *resented* the opinions in the least, but at that juncture he *needed* the unquestioned trust of the two men.

He was not in the best of humours, therefore, as he turned unto Whitcomb Street on his way to Charing Cross. The normal plainness of his features was deepened by a scowl, and the general result startled the few people who glanced at him.

But at eight o'clock in the evening Whitcomb Street is

not a crowded thoroughfare, and there was no one near them when the old man spoke to him. He was standing in a passage near the Pall Mall end, and Knocker could not see him clearly.

"Hullo, Knocker!" he said.

Thompson swung round.

In the darkness he made out the dim figure, the most conspicuous feature of which was a long, white beard.

"Hullo!" returned Thompson, suspiciously, for as far as he knew he did not number among his acquaintances an old man with a white beard.

"It's cold . . ." said the old man.

"What d'you want?" asked Thompson curtly. "Who are you?"

"I am an old man, Knocker."

"Look here what's the game? I don't know you . . ."

"No. But I know you."

"If that's all you've got to say . . ." said Knocker uneasily.

"It is nearly all. Will you buy a paper? It is not an ordinary paper, I assure you."

"How do you mean . . . not an ordinary paper?"

"It is to-morrow night's 'Echo'," said the old man calmly.

"You're loopy, old chap, that's what's wrong with you. Look here, things aren't too brisk, but here's half a dollar . . . and better luck!" For all his lack of principle, Knocker had the crude generosity of those who lived precariously.

"Luck!" The old man laughed with a quietness that jarred on Knocker's nerves. In some queer way it seemed to run up and down his spine.

"Look here!" he said again, conscious of some strange, unreal quality in the old, dimly-seen figure in the passage.

"What's the blinking game?"

"It is the oldest game in the world, Knocker."

"Not so free with my name . . . if you don't mind."

"Are you ashamed of it?"

"No," said Knocker, stoutly. "What do you want? I've got no time to waste with the likes of you."

"Then go . . . Knocker."

"What do you *want*?" Knocker insisted, strangely uneasy.

"Nothing. Won't you take the paper? There is no other like it in the world. Nor will there be—for twenty-four hours."

"I don't suppose there *are* many of to-morrow's papers on sale . . . yet," said Knocker with a grin.

"It contains to-morrow's winners," said the old man, in the same casual manner.

"I don't think!" retorted Knocker.

"There it is; you may read for yourself."

From the darkness a paper was thrust at Knocker, whose unwilling fingers closed on it. A laugh came from somewhere in the recesses in the passage, and Knocker was alone.

He was suddenly and uncomfortably aware of his beating heart, but gripped himself and walked on until he came to a lighted shop front where he glanced at the paper.

"Thursday, July 29, 1926 . . ." he read.

He thought a moment.

It was Wednesday . . . he was positive it was Wednesday. He took out his diary. It was Wednesday, the twenty-eighth day of July—the last day of the Kempton Park meeting. He had no doubt on the point, none whatever.

With a strange feeling he glanced at the paper again. July 29, 1926. He turned to the back page almost instinctively—the page with the racing results.

Gatwick.

That day's meeting was at Kempton Park. To-morrow was the first day of the Gatwick meeting, and there, staring at him, were the five winners. He passed his hand across his forehead; it was damp with cold perspiration.

"There's a trick somewhere," he muttered to himself, and carefully re-examined the date of the paper. It was printed on each page . . . clear and unaltered. He scrutinised the unit figure of the year, but the "six" had not been tampered with.

He glanced hurriedly at the front page. There was a flaring headline about the Coal Strike . . . that wasn't twenty-five. With professional care he examined the racing results. Inkerman had won the first race . . . Inkerman—and Knocker had made up his mind to back Paper Clip with more money than he could afford to lose. Paper Clip was merely an also-ran. He noticed that people who passed were glancing at him curiously. Hurriedly he pushed the paper into an inner pocket and walked on.

Never had Knocker so needed a drink. He entered a snug little "pub." near Charing Cross, and was thankful to find the saloon bar nearly deserted. Fortified with his drink, he turned again to the paper. Inkerman had come home at 6 to 1. He made certain hurried but satisfactory calculations. Salmon House had won the second; he had expected that, but not at such a price . . . 7 to 4 on. Shallot—Shallot of all horses!—had romped away with the third, the big race. Seven lengths . . . at 100 to 8! Knocker licked his dry lips. There was no fake about the paper in his hand. He knew the horses that were running at Gatwick the following day, and the results were there before him. The fourth and fifth winners were at short prices; but Inkerman and Shallot were enough . . .

It was too late to get into touch with any of the bookmakers that evening, and in any case it would not be advisable to put money on before the day of the race. The better way would be to go to Gatwick in the morning and wire the bets from the course.

He had another drink . . . and another.

Gradually, in the genial atmosphere of the saloon bar, his uneasiness left him. The affair ceased to appear uncanny and grotesque, and became a part of the casual happenings of the day. Into Knocker's slightly fuddled brain came the memory of a film he had once seen which had made a big impression on him at the time. There was an Eastern magician in the film, with a white beard, a long, white beard just like the one belonging to the old man. The magician had done the most extraordinary things . . . on the screen.

But whatever the explanation, Knocker was satisfied it was not a fake. The old chap had not asked for any money; indeed, he had not even taken the half-crown that Knocker had offered him. And, as Knocker knew, you always collected the dibs—or attempted to—if you were running a fake.

He thought pleasantly of what he would do in the ring at Gatwick the following day. He was in rather low water, but he could put his hands on just about enough to make the bookies sit up. And with a second winner at 100 to 8!

He had still another drink, and stood the barman one too.

"D'you know anything for to-morrow?" The man behind the bar knew Thompson quite well by sight and reputation.

Knocker hesitated.

"Yes," he said. "Sure thing. Salmon House in the second race. Price'll be a bit short, but it's a snip."

"Thanks very much; I'll have a bit on meself."

Ultimately he left the saloon bar. He was a little shaky. His doctor had warned him not to drink, but surely on such a night . . .

The following morning he went to Gatwick. It was a meeting he liked, and usually he was very lucky there. But that day it was not merely a question of luck. There was a streak of caution in his bets on the first race, but he flung caution to the wind after Inkerman had come in a comfortable winner—and at 6 to 1. The horse and the price! He had no doubts left. Salmon House won the second, a hot favourite at 7 to 4 on.

In the big race most of the punters left Shallot alone. The horse had little form, and there was no racing reason why anyone should back him. He was among what the bookies call "the rags." But Knocker cared nothing for "form" that day. He spread his money judiciously. Twenty here, twenty there. Not until ten minutes before the race did he wire any money to the West-end offices, but some of the biggest men in the game opened their eyes when his wires came through. He was out to win a fortune. And he won.

As the horses entered the straight one of them was lengths ahead of the field. It carried the flashing yellow and blue of Shallot's owner. The groan that went up from the punters around him was satisfactory, but there was no thrill in the race for him; he had been certain that Shallot would win. There was no objection . . . and he proceeded to collect.

His pockets were bulging with notes, but his winnings were as nothing compared with the harvest he would reap from the big men in the West End. He ordered a bottle of champagne and with a silent grin drank the health of the old man with the beard before he sent for the taxi that would take him back to the station. There was no train for half an hour, and, when at last it started, his carriage had filled with racing men, among whom were several he knew. The wise race-goers rarely wait until the end of a meeting.

Knocker was usually very expansive after a good day, but that afternoon he took no part in the conversation, with the exception of an occasional grunt when a remark was made to him. Try as he would he could not keep his thoughts

away from the old man. It was the memory of the laugh that remained with him most vividly. He could still feel that queer sensation down his spine. . . .

On a sudden impulse he took out the paper, which was still in his pocket. He had no real interest in news, as such, for racing absorbed the whole of his very limited imagination. As far as he could tell from a casual inspection it was a very ordinary sort of paper. He made up his mind to get another in town and compare the two in order to see if the old man had spoken the truth. Not that it mattered very much, he assured himself.

Suddenly his incurious glance was held. A paragraph in the stop-press column had caught his eye. An exclamation burst from him.

"Death in race-train," the paragraph was headed. Knocker's heart was pumping, but he read on mechanically: "Mr. Martin Thompson, a well-known racing man, died this afternoon as he was returning from Gatwick."

He got no further; the paper fell from his limp fingers on to the floor of the carriage.

"Look at Knocker," someone said. "He's ill . . ."

He was breathing heavily and with difficulty.

"Stop . . . stop the train," he gasped, and strove to rise and lurch toward the communication cord.

"Steady on, Knocker," one of them said, and grasped his arm. "You sit down, old chap . . . mustn't pull that darned thing . . ."

He sat down . . . or rather collapsed into the seat. His head fell forward.

They forced whisky between his lips, but it was of no avail.

"He's dead," came the awestruck voice of the man who held him.

No one noticed the paper on the floor. In the general upset it had been kicked under the seat, and it is not possible to say what became of it. Perhaps it was swept up by the cleaners at Waterloo.

Perhaps . . .

No one knows.

C. PATRICK THOMPSON

Sunset Woman

SUNSET WOMAN

THE second day after what men still call the "Big Night," Weldon, of the staff, arrived at my quarters, said briefly in answer to my query, "Yes, my boy, official capacity," and ran me in his car fifty miles along the westward cliffs to a lonely spot where a big white house, ringed with lawns and coquettish flower-gardens and begirt with tall pines, looked out on the North Sea.

Having explored the house, the grounds and the adjacent beach, we adjourned to sit in an old-rose boudoir that bore fresh and extremely charming traces of its late occupant, and discuss the complexities of the affair. The threads reached wide in all directions, crossed and recrossed, but always at the axis were the woman and the Last Patrol.

Now, the fact that the Last Patrol should be Second-Lieutenant Dunkley made the matter a delicate one. For Dunkley was the newspaper hero of the hour. Official kudos and a decoration were about to descend on him in a beneficent shower. For had he not, at 11 o'clock on the "Big Night," in most spectacular fashion downed a Zeppelin off the coast, and, flung out of control by the explosion, himself hit the water and smashed? At the moment he reposed in hospital with a broken leg and contusions, and a mob of reporters cursed him in that he resolutely refused to be interviewed.

So we debated the matter at length, and because the white house and its people were out of the running for all time, and the whole affair had been productive of more good than harm to us, we decided there should be no washing of dirty linen. Military code or no military code, it's no use smashing a boy who is a good pilot just because he makes a fool of himself over a woman.

"Nineteen, did you say?" said Weldon. "Well, no man's proof against Eve and the apple at that tender age. There doesn't seem to be much the matter with him otherwise, and

he has done good work here—the Lord only knows how good! Go and hear what he's got to say, and I'll stopper up the police and any inquisitive military persons."

Accordingly I repaired to the hospital and sought Dunkley in the little dim annexe where he lay. He looked pretty bad, but the expression as of a suffering animal on his boyish face was not all due to physical pain. He divined the object of my visit immediately, and when the sister had gone, without preliminaries, he began to tell me about his Circe and the incidents that culminated in the smashing of the German seaplane and the bombing of Z5 off the coast.

His tale was perforce spasmodic, interspersed by rambling accounts of glamorous hours passed with the woman when the madness was on him, interrupted by my questions and spaced at irregular intervals by periods when for long minutes neither of us spoke.

He talked with bleak frankness of those thoughts and feelings which a man generally hides away in the innermost recesses of his heart; he made confessions of helpless enslavement that torture would not have wrung from the most spiritless creature. It seemed that he looked into his soul and saw, with a sort of fury, with pitiless scorn and with loathing, the false image of himself created by his terrible infatuation. God knows what he suffered in the wrenching of that story from himself.

It was blind fate which first brought him into her ken. He was the last of the evening patrols, and his area lay between the aerodrome and a point fifty miles to the westward, where he linked up with the south-flying watcher from the next coast station. One evening, at sunset, engine trouble forced him to seek a landing-place some twenty miles from his turning point. He came down in a meadow behind the white house. When the woman, strolling homewards along the footpath, came on him there, busy tinkering with his machine, I doubt not but her subtle intelligence leaped on the instant to the vague outline of her ultimate plan.

Of course, she invited him indoors for refreshment; insisted, very sweetly. Of course, she fascinated him. By some devilish instinct she hit on the right note easily and naturally, mingled with her own feminine charm the glamour of adventure and romance. Without noting the lapse of time, he stayed an hour.

The London season had exhausted her, she told him, and so she was taking a rest cure, alone by the sea. She was languid, slightly tired, and even on that first day he experienced a longing to take her in his arms, the vague desire to comfort and protect that a charming woman inspires in a boy when she seems to confide in him and confess weakness. She asked him, with a smile, hinting at wistfulness whether he would ever come to her again out of the sunset.

He came many times. He fluttered about the candle, poor deluded moth, at first with diffidence, pausing occasionally a brief half-hour or so in his patrol; then, as the lure strengthened, almost every day. She made him talk about himself, and his life at the aerodrome, and incidentally he told her his times of flight and the routine system of his fellows. Very often they would go for a drive through the twilight in her great, soft-humming car. The periods lengthened to an hour, an hour and a half, and then he had to make a bee-line for home in order to get in to time.

He endeavoured to compromise with his conscience by starting earlier, but at such times she was clearly disappointed, ostensibly because he flouted her whim that he should come with the sunset; and she would keep him waiting until the dying sun reddened the western sky.

She begged him to allow her this faint colouring of romance. One can imagine her watching from the flagged terrace the tiny black speck that was her adorer appear in the far distance and come speeding towards her, growing every minute larger and more distinct, until high over the house he swept round in a vast spiral and dropped gently to earth. One can imagine her graceful passage across the lawn to meet him, a subdued gladness in her eyes, a faint smile on her lips, and the gentle pressure of her soft hand, the quiet intimate touch that thrilled him like fine champagne. And vividly one can picture the sentinel's machine, its engine stilled, lying abandoned in that solitary place; and the great sixty-mile gap, that huge door in the coast, standing wide to the chance intruder, as vulnerable as a trench system from which the garrison has fled.

Although even now Dunkley knew nothing of such activities, I deduce that it was during these periods that the little seaplane with the German pilot and observer, and the British tri-coloured discs, returned from its spying expeditions

inland and was quickly landed and run up the beach to its hiding-place in the big coach-house. God and the Hun alone know whence the petrol came, but it may be a U-boat slipped out of Zeebrugge and made a swift nocturnal journey with supplies of the precious spirit.

One day Loie told the boy that relatives were staying with her, and he must not come until she was once more alone. He had perforce to give his word, and for a fortnight that seemed an age all the light and colour was gone from his life.

The note reopening the portal of his paradise arrived the evening before the Big Night.

"You need not pass when you come flying into the sunset to-morrow evening," she wrote. "I shall be alone."

She had not underestimated the hungry eagerness which a fortnight away from her would arouse in him. He went up an hour earlier, and so missed by ten minutes the general "Stand-to" that flashed across the Channel from Dunkirk and was wired on to all the coast stations and the inland aerodromes. And while he dined with her in the old-rose boudoir by the light of shaded candles, and kissed the slim fingers that tilted the magnum over his glass, four hundred machines met over the northern coast of France and closed in battle.

I picture the strained anxiety of the woman listening, listening, for the far roar of the German 'planes, as she petted her captive and plied him with wine. Something of her uneasiness communicated itself to him; he wished to complete his patrol and return. But she made him sit down on the sofa by her side. He caught the perfume of her, and embracing her madly he kissed her bare shoulders, her throat and her lips. She did not resist, and as she sank back his encircling arm struck against a hard object wedged in between the cushions. He pulled it out and found he held a revolver.

The sight of the weapon sobered him queerly. He glanced at his watch and perceived with astonishment it was past ten o'clock. He reiterated the imperative need for his departure, just for a little while, to be sure. . . . She must have understood then that further attempt to detain him might lead him to suspect and come to a quick decision:

But Fate decreed that at the door he should turn impulsively to blow her a kiss. Too late she dropped the revolver behind the cushions, too late the tiger gleam in her eyes faded to a

tender smile. Realisation struck him like a blow in the face. A moment they stared at each other, then as she made a quick movement he sprang and wrested the weapon from her grasp.

He struck her heavily in the face ; tore the French windows wide and leaped out, trampling the rose bushes. Racing down the path that led to the meadow, he heard her loud high cry behind him. He chocked up his machine and endeavoured to spin the propeller. But the engine was cold, and as he wrestled to start up some one fired at him and crashed away through the bushes.

At length he got her started, and skimming the sward rose at a steep angle and beat round to the sea. As he passed over the house a dark figure hurried across the road, and jumping down on to the sands, ran to the edge of the sea. The indistinct shape of the seaplane became visible floating on the crinkled sea close to the beach. The figure gesticulated frantically. Mad with rage, Dunkley swept down and released a bomb, and then another. They crashed in quick succession, and volcanic spurts of sand shot far into the air.

Below, the seaplane was tearing great white furrows in the water as it rushed out to sea. All at once it skimmed the surface and began to rise. Turning down over its tail Dunkley saw through the ring-sight a blob that was the pilot's head, and fired.

The machine seemed to fall back on its tail, it plunged downwards and smashed into shapeless wreckage on the placid surface.

The boy could tell me little of what had occurred after that. The Zeppelin that was evidently intended to create a demonstration farther north he heard humming far at sea on his way homewards, and, mounting to twelve thousand feet, darted down on it as it sped by beneath him. It was mere chance, the simplest incident of that night, and, ironically enough, it was that that had smothered inquiry into his absence until something of the affair at the white house came to Weldon's ear.

He asked me what had happened to the German raiders scheduled to pass through the unpatrolled sector on the Big Night, and I told him all that I myself had heard but a few hours before—how our Intelligence had got wind of the concentration of a vast aerial fleet for a night raid on an unprecedented scale, with the object of finally realising the

Teutonic dream of laying London in ruins ; how the Dunkirk and Calais squadrons had been doubled and a portion of the Army wing moved north ; and that a few minutes after it was known the German fleet had started from its various bases two hundred of our machines were speeding north to intercept them.

Outnumbered by nearly two to one, the Germans' formation was broken. Isolated clusters broke away and were pursued far inland or across the sea, driven down or crashed. From Ostend out over the Channel and the North Sea the air was full of duelling planes.

And throughout many a day the tides washed up the riddled corpses of the airmen and the wreckage of great 'planes. Of the hundred and thirty Germans that started, no-one can say how many returned, but certain it is that through the sixty-mile gap on the East Coast not a single one passed.

"That wasn't my fault," said Dunkley. "I left the area open. If the Huns had come, if our spies hadn't found out in time. . . . Is it a court-martial?"

"Don't be a fool," I said. "You would have been shot if that fleet had got through. But it didn't. Speaking in my official capacity as your C.O., I shall be glad to see you back in the squadron so soon as you are fit."

"And Loie?" he asked after a while.

"She was killed in a motor accident yesterday. Trying to get away too fast, I suppose."

He said that he was glad. Even after what had happened, I think the woman still weighed with him sufficiently for him to dread the possibility of her being arrested and mauled in the Press—in the end shot, maybe. And because it had spared him pain I was glad I had thought of such a thing as a motor accident.

Needless cruelty to have told him of that thing lying on the edge of the great holes torn in the beach. It was—well, there's no use going into horrors. But it was a woman right enough.

KATHLEEN RIVETT

Portrait of a Queen

PORTRAIT OF A QUEEN

THE long rows of gods and kings in the museum stare gravely down the centuries out of inscrutable faces. On marble and granite and black basalt thrones they sit, with long, square hands quietly on their knees. The gods and goddesses have grotesque animal heads, but the faces of the kings are all carved to the same mask, with long eyelids, full, smiling lips and short, blunt nose.

But there is one which is quite different. She has a long, round neck, and her head is balanced eagerly on it like a flower. She has a honey-coloured skin, and great brown eyes lengthened at the corners, under brows that are like curling tendrils. There is a merriness and a certain wonder in the eyes and a great sweetness in the deep corners of her red lips. She wears her tall ceremonial crown bravely.

Queen Nesaru smiles a little.

Tarharqua strolled up and down the courtyard kicking a pebble idly from time to time. He wondered how long Menebre would keep him hanging about before he got an audience. He wriggled his shoulders irritably at the thought of the work waiting for him in his dusty yard back in the city, and itched to get at his mallet and chisel again.

Things were going well for him now, since he had carried out the decoration of Gati, the Chancellor's villa. He had become the fashion in Thebes, and had been plunged in sketches and measurements when the peremptory summons from the Vizier arrived. Amid much blowing of trumpets and obeisances at the pronouncement of the Royal names, Tarharqua was given to understand that his presence was desired immediately at the palace.

Looking over the parapet, Tarharqua saw the leisurely throngs in the street, and heard the laughter and chattering from the market. The clear Egyptian sunlight polished to silver the busy Nile.

At last there was some kind of subdued commotion beyond

the low arch leading to the state apartments. Then a soldier came into the courtyard, his pleated linen kilt swinging as he walked. He saluted by dropping his spear-butt on the ground, and said :

"Come this way. The Vizier will see you."

Tarharqua followed him through arched passages and courtyards where the indigo shadows of great columns lay supine on marble pavements. The soldier preceded him into a small chamber, saluted, and announced :

"Tarharqua, son of Senmut."

Menebre—a corpulent man with a comfortable belly—lollod in an armchair of inlaid cedar wood, and fanned himself with a palm-leaf fan. A retired soldier, he was sometimes sadly at sea in the delicate intrigue and diplomacy of administration.

"Let's see. Tarharqua. H'm. Oh, yes, you're the sculptor, aren't you?"

Tarharqua bowed. He resented the slightly patronising tone of this tough old warrior.

"Well, sir down. Have a drink. Where are those girls?" he added irritably.

He clapped his hands and told the slave girl who appeared to bring some more wine.

"Gives you a devil of a thirst, this heat," grumbled Menebre, gulping down the cool white wine. Then he settled back in his chair, his hands folded over his neat little paunch.

"I suppose you wonder what you've been sent for?"

"I would not presume—"

"Quite right, my boy! Humility is becoming in the young. Nevertheless, since you appear to be sufficiently intelligent, it will not surprise you to learn that your prowess in art has not been entirely unobserved in high quarters. Even, I may say, in the very highest quarters."

Tarharqua sat on the edge of his chair, his heart thumping with excitement.

"In fact," continued Menebre pompously, "Pharaoh himself has deigned to cast his all-seeing eye in your direction—an attention which to my mind is a little unwarranted."

Menebre maddeningly paused to pour another cup of wine.

"It appears that the Queen has been worrying—that her Majesty has expressed a desire for a portrait to be executed in

this new kind of plaster one hears of. Granite and a chisel were good enough for *my* forefathers, but there," said Menebre heavily, "there's always some newfangled notion afoot these days."

"Anyway, Pharaoh was graciously pleased to mention you in connection with carrying out this extraordinary privilege. Out of respect for your father, I suppose. There was an artist for you—the old ways were good enough for him."

Menebre sighed and reflectively emptied a further cup of wine.

"But there it is. You're to report here to-morrow after the temple ceremony, and get on with the job right away."

"I don't know how to thank you," spluttered Tarharqua, radiant with emotion, and looking extraordinarily handsome. "Please convey my most humble thanks to his Majesty, and my assurances that he will have no cause to regret his decision."

"I hope not," replied Menebre, shortly. He was still a little sore at the departure of his Royal master from the prescribed order.

He rose and yawned. A sudden thought struck him.

"By the way, just one word of advice. Have you ever seen the Queen?"

"No," said Tarharqua.

Menebre eyed him reflectively, taking in the lithe grace that informed Tarharqua's body, the black hair and absurd fringe of thick eyelashes. By some extraordinary association of ideas a brief picture of his Royal master flashed through his mind—thin, round-shouldered, dyspeptic and elderly. Uncomfortably Menebre dismissed it, and fixed Tarharqua with a sagacious old eye.

"You're a good-looking boy, Tarharqua," he said slowly. "See that you keep your eyes on your work. Understand?"

"Perfectly," said Tarharqua, and bowed to hide the contemptuous smile on his mouth. As if there were any danger that he would look with the eye of desire on the first lady of the land!

"Well, that's all. See that you're here early." Menebre nodded, and parted the purple curtains behind him. Tarharqua strode out of the palace with such exultation in his bearing that the soldier on guard outside Menebre's chamber gave him his smartest salute.

Tarharqua's brown fingers moulded and kneaded the clay before him. His thoughts whirled perplexingly. Who could have guessed that Nesaru the Queen was as lovely as Nesaru the woman? He had covered himself with confusion on being shown into her presence by remaining stock-still and silent for a full half-minute. Then he remembered to drop on both knees, with eyes cast on the ground, and murmured incoherently the formal salutation.

A sweet voice with a hint of mockery in it said :

" Rise, Tarharqua. Bring him some wine, one of you."

Sinking on to the low ebony stool to which Nesaru waved him, Tarharqua had a dim vision of slave girls in filmy draperies clustered about him, one offering him wine, another cakes and fruit. He accepted automatically, still distracted by the scents and the sound of fountains, and above all the exquisite loveliness of Nesaru.

Her lips were very red and full, with deep, mysterious corners, and her skin was the colour of honey. She had delicate, high cheek-bones, and a pointed chin. But it was her eyes that fascinated Tarharqua. They were big and brown and of unfathomable depths, and her eyebrows had been produced with antimony to long slanting lines. She wore her hair in long plaits, dozens of them, wound in and out with gold threads. Instead of the high ceremonial crown she wore a wreath of blue lotus flowers.

The room was not very large. Exquisite birds and beasts floated with thistledown lightness on the painted walls, and fishes slid between the tangled stems of lotus plants. Great alabaster vases stood about filled with sheaves of the sacred flowers. The air was heavy with their perfume. Slave girls danced to a hidden tinkling of stringed instruments at the far end of the room, where it opened on to a courtyard. And the whispering ladies of the court sat on the steps of the dais, subjecting the embarrassed young sculptor to a bright-eyed scrutiny.

Nesaru spoke to him about his work.

" They say you have studied with our best masters," she said.

" My father was my best teacher," said Tarharqua. " He was a great artist."

" I have heard that you are no discredit to him," said the Queen, smiling a little. They talked for a while, then

Tarharqua settled down to work. The artist came to the surface, and his face grew keen and disinterested.

Nesaru leaned on her couch. The slave girls postured, and sang weird minor songs.

The fountain tinkled in the courtyard, and the shadows travelled from one wall to the other. It was not an atmosphere favourable to Menebre's advice—"Keep your eyes on your work!"

At noon, Nesaru told Tarharqua he must go.

"Come to-morrow at the same time," she said.

Then she walked through the lane of slave girls to the further chamber, followed by her attendants, and Tarharqua was left alone.

Every day he presented himself at the palace, hurrying through the high, white lanes of Thebes in the morning coolness. It was not always the same.

Sometimes he was kept waiting an hour or more, pacing irritably in the courtyard where he had first attended the Vizier. Once or twice a giggling slave girl came running to tell him that the Queen could not see him that day. Then Tarharqua would return to his workshop, kicking the door angrily to behind him. No other work had any savour for him.

One day, as he was about to leave the palace after a futile wait, Tarharqua was stopped by a soldier.

"From the Vizier," he said, saluting with precision, and presenting a sealed roll of papyrus. The sculptor was well known at the palace now, and the general opinion was that, as things were going, it was as well to keep in with him.

Slave girls talk, and even ladies of the court are not above a little idle gossip, now and again. It was whispered that the Queen had looked very graciously on her good-looking sculptor.

Meanwhile, Tarharqua tore open the sealed missive and read, with extreme delight, the few words contained in it.

It was an invitation to a banquet to be given that night in honour of the Assyrian Prince newly arrived at court. The Vizier, on behalf of the most divine Pharaoh, commanded his presence.

"Convey my most profound thanks to the Vizier Menebre," said Tarharqua, "and say that the King's word is a command. . . . Oh, here you are," he added, taking a coin from his wallet as the soldier showed a tendency to linger.

"Your words have been heard," returned the warrior, more than ever convinced that Tarharqua was worth attention. He saluted and marched away, while Tarharqua rushed off to be bathed and perfumed.

The festivities were in full swing. Long tables stretched almost the length of the great throne room, heaped with gold and silver and enamelled dishes. Crystal cups from Phœnicia, alabaster wine jars of the finest Egyptian workmanship, and bowls from Babylon, studded with turquoise and amethyst, banked the table. Slaves stood behind each guest, and waved tall ostrich feather fans. Nubians moved to and fro bearing trays smoking with savoury meats and strange delicacies from Persia, India and China. Lamps stood on the table and illumined the faces above them, but only served to deepen the haze that hung at the towering heads of the pillars. Stringed instruments made a subdued accompaniment to the hum of voices and outbursts of laughter.

Two great gold thrones, inlaid with sacred designs in ivory and ebony, stood at the head of the banqueting room. Pharaoh, wearing the full regalia of double crown and ceremonial costume, occupied one. In the other sat Nesaru, rather aloof and silent. She looked round the vivacious gathering with a certain weariness. The banquet had been in progress for several hours, and faces were flushed and voices becoming rather high and hysterical.

Tarharqua didn't like it at all. Court orgies were out of his line altogether. His ascetic upbringing under Senmut's puritan eye had not prepared him for the licence with which he was surrounded.

Menebre delicately nudged the Chief High Priest, who was seated next to him.

"Our young friend looks a bit like a fish out of water," he said.

The Chief High Priest looked sourly down the table to where Tarharqua sat, with a pretty Circassian girl laughing up into his face. She had set herself out to overcome him, but so far without great success.

"He oughtn't to be here at all," muttered the High Priest. "I don't approve of commoners at state banquets."

Menebre shrugged his shoulders.

"The Queen insisted. It seemed wiser to give in than to have it brought up to Pharaoh. I don't wish the boy any harm, and you know what would happen if Pharaoh gets wind of any intrigue. The West Bank, and a nice walk up the Valley."

"Intrigue?" said the High Priest sharply. "You don't mean to tell me——"

"Nothing in it, nothing in it whatever," replied Menebre hastily, absentmindedly putting a grape between the parted lips of his dinner partner, who was practically on his lap.

"I warned the boy to watch his step. He's all right. But you know what Pharaoh is—only a breath of suspicion, and somebody's going to suffer. So I thought it wiser to let Tarharqua come, and trust to his not being noticed."

The High Priest didn't reply. He was watching Queen Nesaru. She had said very little the whole evening. Leaning back in her high gold chair, she toyed with food and sent it away again. Her glass remained full. Prince Sargon on her right, as guest of honour, attempted to make conversation, but the Queen answered absently.

"She's a lovely creature," thought Prince Sargon. "What a pity she's made of ice."

At last, after several monosyllabic replies, Prince Sargon's attention was drawn to the fact that if Queen Nesaru's thoughts were wandering, her eyes definitely were not. Again and again they came to rest on the moody-looking, handsome young man further down the table. He seemed to be having difficulty in restraining the ardour of the Circassian, whom wine was making amorous. From the rigidity of his attitude and the curl of his lip, it seemed that his mood was not one of gaiety.

"Oh! ho! A little romance, eh?" thought the Prince, noticing that time and again the young man's eyes returned to the queen, but fell as soon as they encountered her look.

A little maliciously he leaned towards her, thinking of those unsuccessful marriage negotiations, and said:

"A very handsome young man. A protégé of yours?"

Nesaru started. Following the Prince's gaze, which discreetly dropped on the instant, she said coldly:

"That is the court sculptor."

To do him justice, Prince Sargon had no intention of creating trouble. He had no notion of the intense jealousy

that burned in Pharaoh's breast. Therefore it was only with a slight mockery that he raised his voice sufficiently to catch Pharaoh's attention, and said :

"Indeed. Court sculptors are not usually so good-looking. I congratulate you."

Unfortunately, Pharaoh was already feeling the preliminary pangs of a complaint that attacks prince and commoner indiscriminately. Dyspepsia sharpened his voice as he demanded : "What's that ? The court sculptor ? Is *he* here ?"

"He is here—by invitation of the Vizier," replied Nesaru with the slightest emphasis, and indicating Tarharqua.

Pharaoh regarded him with dislike. His thin eyebrows were drawn together.

Menebre, noticing the incident, nudged the High Priest again.

"I wouldn't be Tarharqua for a whole packet of slave girls," he said, chuckling.

"I believe your department was responsible for his appointment ?" returned the High Priest, silyly.

That finished Menebre, and the High Priest, one well-manicured hand tapping the table before him, murmured almost into space :

"A very charming young man. It is a pity if he is, after all, mixed up with these sun worship fanatics."

He added, aware that the royal ear was inclined in his direction :

"Perhaps, under the circumstances, Pharaoh would do well to look into this matter of sculpture."

His motives in thus giving Tarharqua a gentle push down the steep path of damnation were mixed. In the first place he was a fanatic on the subject of the inviolacy of the Royal women. It was intolerable to him that even a breath of suspicion should ever so lightly be wafted to Nesaru's door. In the second place, from all reports there was a very real danger of unorthodoxy in this young artist's ideas. Change spelt danger to the priesthood.

The High Priest left Menebre at the post as far as conservatism was concerned. So far as he was aware, there was not the slightest truth in the suggestion of sun-worship, with all its damning implications. But he knew that at the moment the topic was the shortest cut to Pharaoh's attention, and the High Priest had no scruples where principles were concerned.

Pharaoh disliked and feared the Chief High Priest, but he could not afford to ignore the hint. The Lord of the Two Kingdoms was a worried man. Campaigns in Persia were not proceeding as they should, his best navigators and a third of his fleet had been missing for three months on a voyage of exploration.

"We shall give our attention to the matter," said Pharaoh coldly, and, to silence any further noxious comments from his minister, signalled for the dancers to be brought in.

Late that night, when the palace walls were bathed in unbroken moonlight, a step sounded outside the chamber of the King. Tossing wakefully on his couch, he heard the low challenge of the soldier on guard, a muffled reply, and then a shadow darkened the pale square of moonlight on the wall.

"Who is that?" demanded Pharaoh.

A tinkle of bracelets and a flash of skirts, and at his side knelt the Circassian beauty who had plagued Tarharqua so unsuccessfully at the banquet.

"I said no women to-night, Khasima," muttered Pharaoh, but with a certain lack of conviction. Khasima was usually a favourite. He liked her exuberant youth. Now, when she nestled on his couch, he made no further protest.

But Khasima made a mistake. Having obtained Pharaoh's attention, she embarked on an allusory but venomous disquisition on her late banqueting partner, whose lack of response had left her feeling very sore. That might not have damned her, although Pharaoh's brow knitted dangerously, and his grey eyes were like vicious stones. But the little lady Khasima blundered light-heartedly into the trap of maligning one who must never be touched with the breath of calumny—the Queen.

"That's enough," said Pharaoh, sharply. "I don't want to hear any more. Get back to your quarters."

A little taken aback Khasima slid to the ground, and stood looking down at him. Then, recognising the resolution behind that thin, venomous mask, she stretched an obeisance and went.

There was regret but no hesitation in Pharaoh's eye as he called softly to the guard. Khasima did not return to the women's quarters that night or any other night. The Queen is always—the Queen.

Sunlight streamed into Nesaru's chamber. The little fishes swam merrily on the walls, and the kingfishers hung motionless above them, catching all the sunshine in their wings.

Nesaru sat on her couch. Her gossamer-thin robe clung about her and hinted at the golden skin beneath. Tarharqua was turned to water. His hands trembled as he put the last touches to his portrait. And such a portrait! Never had such a thing been seen in Egypt. Here was no conventional mask, modelled to the age-old tradition of Egyptian sculpture, but warm, living beauty. The honey-coloured face of Nesaru smiled back at him, imperious, appealing, elusive. It was heresy, but Tarharqua knew no regret.

"It is finished," he said, standing back regretfully, with the dislike of the artist for any such arbitrary statement.

"Let me see," said Nesaru, clasping her hands together impulsively.

Tarharqua turned the bust on its stand.

"Oh!" she said, and "Oh!" again.

Very slowly she came down from the dais and approached it. Hesitatingly she touched the smooth cheek with one finger, and then touched her own.

"Am I—like that, Tarharqua? So eager?" She laughed a little, with a sudden catch in the sound.

"You make me seem as if I wanted to look ahead, far ahead into the future. I shouldn't be beautiful, then, Tarharqua. You shouldn't make me look into the future."

"You will never be old," said Tarharqua. "It's not nearly beautiful enough. But it was as near as I knew how to make it. You are too beautiful to set down in clay or stone."

"And now," said Nesaru, "you won't come any more." Her brown eyes grew dark, and she laid a hand on her breast.

Tarharqua could only gaze at her with misery written all over his face.

"You must say 'Good-bye!'" said Nesaru, the words dropping like curdled tears into the silence.

With a strangled kind of sob Tarharqua suddenly knelt and put his arms round her, pressing his hot, agonised face against her knees.

At that precise moment the purple curtains swept aside, and in stalked Pharaoh, accompanied by the Chief High Priest, with the Vizier dodging unhappily in the background.

After a congested pause, during which Tarharqua sprang to his feet, Pharaoh growled.

"What's the meaning of this?" He added, "Clear these creatures out of here," indicating with a wave of the hand the awed slave girls and the intrigued but more discreet ladies in attendance, who had seeped in at the rumour of a fracas. They disappeared with silence and despatch.

Advancing into the room, Pharaoh's eye was caught by the portrait. For a full minute he stared at it, and a purple tide surged into his face.

"Is this what your Court Sculptor's been creeping into your apartments for?" he exploded. "It's monstrous. It's infamous. I've never seen anything like it in my life."

And indeed the head of Nesaru, smiling serenely into the distance, had none of the solemn tincture of the tomb that invested the only art with which Pharaoh was familiar.

"Have you anything to say about this—abortion?" inquired Pharaoh with an effort.

Tarharqua bowed very low, but said nothing.

After a pregnant pause, "Take him away," ordered Pharaoh inevitably.

Nesaru moved for the first time as the guard stepped smartly into the chamber. She lifted her hand as if to speak, but dropped it again. She turned away as Tarharqua was marched off, and hid her face with one hand. The Queen is—the Queen.

The knife-clean prow of a dahabiyeh cut almost silently through black water. Her ropes and stays creaked a little, and starlight dripped a faint silver on her sails. The south wind blew strongly.

The look-out gazed ahead, a little nasal song escaping from him now and again.

Near him stood Tarharqua. His mind was a mass of whirling thoughts. He hardly realised where he was. It seemed only a minute since he had been jerked out of his damp, rat-ridden cell, and urged down interminable stone corridors, with a couple of spears uncomfortably close to his back. He hadn't cared. Nothing mattered much after that last terrible moment when he realised what the word "Good-bye!" meant.

As he marched down echoing corridors he thought wryly

of old Menebre's advice, given so long ago, it seemed, "Keep your eyes on your work. Understand?" He hadn't understood, of course. He hadn't known how poignantly lovely Nesaru would be.

They had come out into the night air. Tarharqua saw what he had expected—water slapping sluggishly against a tiny landing-stage, and the stars brilliant overhead. There was a splash of oars and the sound of a boat grating against the quay. He knew what *that* meant—the West Bank. And then, after a blind-folded walk—the Valley, with its ghosts and its silence, and, when day dawned, the vultures circling overhead. A man couldn't live long in that heat. That was some faint consolation.

Two or three cloaked figures were talking in low voices at the water's edge. One of them turned to him, and Tarharqua saw that it was Menebre.

"You wouldn't listen to me," he said. "You've only yourself to blame. . . . But there, we're all fools when we're young. . . . The nerve of it, though!"

"Menebre," said Tarharqua urgently. "Do something for me. See that my portrait isn't destroyed. Hide it, and get it out of the palace somehow."

"H'm, you're asking a lot. Pharaoh's been listening to that hatchet-faced rat of a High Priest, and the little Circassian cat—it was she who gave the show away, but it didn't do her much good." Menebre forgot the tenseness of the situation so far as to chuckle.

"At any rate, Pharaoh's convinced you're one of the sun-worship lot. . . . He's like a cat on hot bricks at present. . . . Thinks that shocking portrait of yours the first rumbling of the storm. Still, I'll see what I can do."

He fumbled in his cloak and pressed something into Tarharqua's hand.

"Good-bye—and good luck."

He turned away and entered the small doorway to the palace. The soldiers hustled Tarharqua into the boat. They rowed away from the shore with long, steady strokes.

But the West Bank came no nearer.

"Where are you going?" demanded Tarharqua, with a sudden leap of the heart. Life dies by inches. They wouldn't reply, but soon the riding lights of a big dahabiyeh loomed over their cockleshell of a boat. Without ceremony Tarharqua

was handed up the side. Movements and voices sounded about him, and bare feet padded urgently past in the darkness. Within a very few minutes the dahabiyeh got under way, and soon she was skimming down the river.

Tarharqua stood in the bows, revolving the whole weary drama in his mind. His fingers still clutched the thing that Menebre had pushed in his hand. Remembering it, he unrolled the shred of silk that bound it, and saw that it was a ring. With a suffocating band round his heart Tarharqua recognised it for one that Nesaru had worn when she held out her hands to him and said "Good-bye!"

Then he stood there in the growing light and looked down the grey river as if already he saw the fretful spaces of the sea.

In the museum the little queen looks proudly and unseeingly beyond the heavy ranks of gods and goddesses. Three thousand years ago they, and the forces behind them, were too much for her. Now their power and their priests are broken; their temples are in ruins, and not a head bows at their sacred names.

But the beauty of Queen Nesaru still catches men by the throat, and she will never grow old, although her bones lie brittle in the Valley of Kings, and the name of Tarharqua is forgotten.

WILLIAM GERHARDI

The Big Drum

THE BIG DRUM

THE brass band played *Im Kopfe zwei Äugle*, and it seemed to her that the souls of these men were like notes of this music, crying for something elusive, for something in vain. To blare forth one's love on a brass trumpet! An earnest of one's high endeavour fallen short through the inadequate matter of brass; but withal in these abortive notes one felt the presence of the heights the instrument would reach, alas, if it but could!

It touched her to the heart. She would have liked her Otto to play the trumpet instead of the big drum. It seemed more romantic. Otto was not a bit romantic. He was a soldier all right, but he looked more like a man who had started life as a shoemaker's apprentice, had grown old, and was still a shoemaker's apprentice.

The band played well—a compact synthetic body—but Otto was a forlorn figure who watched the proceedings with sustained and patient interest and was suffered by them, every now and then, to raise his drumstick and give a solitary, judicious “Bang!” And he—a tall gaunt man—seemed as though he were ashamed of his small part.

And as she watched him she felt a pang of pity for herself: wedded to him, she would be forgotten, while life, indifferent, strode by; and no one in the world would care whether she had her share of happiness before she died. And the music brought this out acutely, as if along the hard stone-paved indifference of life it dragged, dragged on excruciatingly its living bleeding soul. It spoke of loneliness, of laughter, of the pathos, pity and futility of life.

She watched them. The bayonets at their side. The military badges of rank. The hard discipline. And the music seemed to say, “Stop! What are you doing? Why are you doing this?” And thoughts flowed into her mind. Of soldiers dreaming on a Sunday afternoon.

A fierce old corporal, of whom everyone was afraid, talking to her of children and of daisies. Soldiers who, too, had dreams in long waves—of what? She did not know—but not this. And the men who stood up and blew the brass trumpets seemed to say, and the shining trumpets themselves seemed to say: "We were not born for the Army; we were born for something better—though Heaven only knows what it is!"

That was so. Undeniably so. Yet she wished it were otherwise. It helped to make allowances for Otto. Whatever else he lacked, it made her think at least he had a soul. But to be wedded for life to the big drum! She did not fancy the idea. It didn't seem a proper career.

But Otto showed no sign of *wanting* to "get on"—even in the orchestra. The most exasperating thing about it all was that Otto showed no sign of even *trying*! She had asked him if he would not, 'a time, "move on" and take over—say, the double-bass. He did not seem to think it either feasible or necessary. Or *nece* ary! He had been with the big drum for close on twelve years. "It's a good drum," he had said. And that was all.

There was no . . . "go" in him. That was it: no go. It was no use denying it. As she watched him—gaunt and spectacled—she wished Otto were more of a man and less of an old maid. The conductor, a boozier with a fat red face full of pimples, some dead and dried up, others still flourishing, was a gallant—every inch a man.

He had the elasticity and suppleness and military alertness of the continental military man. She could not tell his rank from the stripes on his sleeves, but thought he must be a major. His heels were high and tipped with indiarubber, and so were straight and smart, but his trousers lacked the foot-strap to keep them in position—poor dilapidated Austrian Army! How low it had sunk! Nevertheless they were tight and narrow and showed off the major's calves to advantage. He wore a pince-nez, but a rimless kind, through which gazed a pair of not altogether innocent eyes. But a man and a leader of men.

While Otto had no rubber on his heels. His heels looked eaten away. He wore a pair of spectacles through which he peered from afar at his neighbour's music-stand, and at the appointed time—not one-tenth of a second too late or too

early—down came the drumstick with the long-awaited “Bang!” So incidental, so contemptible was Otto’s part that, in addition to handling the drum he had to turn the pages for the man who played the cymbals. It seemed to her humiliating. It was very wrong that Otto had no music-stand of his own.

He smiled shyly, and she turned away, annoyed. The little modiste walked on, meeting the stream of people who promenaded the path surrounding the bandstand; a man on high heels, three girls with a pinched look, a famous Tyrolese basso with a long ruddy beard, a *jeune premier* with whiskers and hair like a wig, whose look appeared to imply: “Here am I.

Innsbruck looked morose that Sunday morning, and the military band in the park executed music that was tattered, gross, a little common, yet compelling, even like the daily fare of life. Oh, why were there no heroes? Of course she would have loved to be dominated. That’s what men were for. She was a womanly woman. From Vienna. Exalted, brimming over with life. These men of the Tyrol! And as for Otto? Why, she could have only waved her hand!

She began to wonder whether she had not really better break it off with him. If men would but realise how little was required from them. Only an outward gesture of romance: a touch sufficed, the rest would be supplied by woman’s powerful imagination. Not even so much. A mere abstention from the cruder forms of clumsiness, a surface effort to conceal one’s feeblest worst. A mere semblance of mastery, a glimpse of a will.

In short, anything at all that would provide the least excuse for loving him as she so wished to do. A minute she stood, thinking. “A minimum. Hardly as much.” There passed along the man on high heels, the three girls with the pinched look, the Tyrolese basso with the long ruddy beard, the *jeune premier* with whiskers and hair like a wig, whose look seemed to say, “Here am I”; then again the man on high heels, the three girls with the pinched look, the Tyrolese singer, and again the *jeune premier* whose look implied, “Here am I.” They walked round and round as if the park were a cage and there was nothing to do but walk round—with heads bent, lifeless, sullenly resolute. And again there came along the man on high heels. “The minimum of a minimum. . . .”

The music resumed. She consulted her programme. Item 7. Potpourri from the operette *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss. She returned to the stand, prepared to give her fiancé another chance. Otto's part, as before, was contemptible, more contemptible than before. He was inactive. He smiled shyly. She coloured. And, looking at him, she knew. She knew it was no use, her love could not bridge the chasm. He was despised by the rest of the band. A stick-in-the-mud. Not a man. A poor fish. Not for her. . . .

The potpourri, as if suddenly turning the corner, broke out into a resounding march, and behold, the big drum now led the way. Bang! bang! bang! bang! Clearly he whacked, never once missing the chance; and the man with the cymbals, as if one heart and brain operated their limbs, clashed the cymbals in astounding unison, the big drum pounding away, pounding away, without cease or respite.

And the trumpeters smiled, as who might say: "Good old big drum! You have come into your own at last!" Bang! bang! bang! bang! The big drum had got loud and excited. And all the people standing around looked as though a great joy had come into their lives: and if they had not been a little shy of each other they would have set out and marched in step with the music, taken up *any* cause and, if only because the music implied that all men were brothers, gone forth if need be and butchered another body of brothers, to the tearing, gladdening strains of the march (since it is not known from what rational cause men could have marched to the war).

And if in the park of the neighbouring town there were just such a band with just such a drum which played this same music, the people of the neighbouring town would have marched to this music and exterminated this town. The conductor, like a driver who, having urged his horse over the hill, leans back and leaves the rest to the horse, conceded the enterprise to the drummer, as if the hard, intricate work were now over and he was taking it easy; his baton moved perfunctorily in the wake of the drum, he looked round and acknowledged the greetings of friends with gay, informal salutes of the left hand, his bland smile freely admitting to all that it was no longer himself but the drum which led them to victory.

Or rather, the hard fight had already been won and these,

behold, were the happy results ! Bang ! bang ! bang ! bang ! Strangers passed smiles of intimate recognition, old men nodded reminiscently, small boys gazed with rapt eyes, women looked sweet and bright-eyed, ready to oblige with a kiss ; while the big drum, conscious of his splendid initiative, pounded away without cease or respite.

"Wonderful ! Beautiful !" said the public surrounding them. And thought : "Noise is a good thing."

The band had described the first circle and was repeating it with added gusto and deliberation. The big drum and the cymbals were pounding, pounding their due through the wholly inadequate blazing of brass. But these did not mind : "Every dog has his day"—and they followed the lead of the drum. He led them. He—Otto ! Her Otto was leading them. God ! Merciful Virgin ! What had she done to deserve such happiness ? Otto ! . . . And she had doubted him, thought there was no "go" in him. No *go* !

She burnt red with shame at the mere thought of it. He was all "go." And didn't he make them go, too, the whole lot of them ? How he led them ! Puffing, the sweat streaming down their purple faces, they blazed away till their cheeks seemed ready to burst but Otto out-drummed them—annihilated their efforts.

He—Otto ! O, God ! Watching him, people could hardly keep still. But that none of them stirred and all of them wanted to, added piquancy to the illusion of motion. They stood rooted—while the drum carried on for them : Bang ! bang ! bang ! bang !

"Marvellous !" sighed the public around them.

Her Otto—cock of the walk ! She could scarcely believe her eyes. Standing in front of the crowd, only a few paces from his side and raising herself on her toes ever so gently in rhythm with the music, so that by the very tininess of her movements she seemed to be sending added impetus into the band, as if, indeed, she were pressing with her little feet some invisible pump, she scanned his face with tenderness, in dumb adoration.

And Otto at the drum must have felt it, for, at this turn, he put new life into his thundering whacks : *Bang ! bang ! bang ! bang !* he toiled, and the conductor, as if divining what was afoot, at that moment accelerated the pace of the march.

"Bravo, bravo!" said the people surrounding them.

There was no doubt about it. This was Art. The unerring precision. The wonderful touch. Otto! . . . Otto, as never before, whacked the big drum, whacked it in excitement, in a frenzy, in transcending exaltation. Thundering bangs! And now she knew—what she couldn't have dreamed—she knew it by his face. Otto was a hero. A leader of men. Something fluttered in her breast, as though a bird had flown in, ready to fly out.

"Now it's all over," thought the people, "and we are going home to lunch." And everyone smiled and felt very happy and gay. A sort of prolonged accelerated thundering of the big drum, and then one tremendous BANG!

The thing was over. The conductor raised a bent hand to the peak of his cap, acknowledging the applause. The bird in her fluttered more wildly than ever. She wanted to cry out, but her throat would not obey. She clutched at her heaving breast with trembling fingers. "My love," she thought. "My king! My captain!——"

ALFRED TRESIDDER SHEPPARD

The Third Medal

THE THIRD MEDAL

PIPPO CERLONE won his first medal at a *fundaco* on the Corleone road. Capponi was "sleeping for himself," as the Sicilians say, at a table outside the inn. There he sat, in hot sunshine, his swathed legs stretched at length, his gun propped against the sun-baked wall, his mouth fly-catching, the tassel of his scarlet cap just nodding with his snores. The old rascal, waking like a peevish child whose slumber has been broken, found himself a captive.

But the second medal told a brisker tale. Scowling mountains looked down on a piece of smart fighting when Pippo shot Roveni. He and two other *carabinieri* were watching the outlaw's body as it leapt in the drollest way, like a landed fish—trying to follow his soul, perhaps, for Roveni was sufficiently devout. In a prayer-book, taken afterwards from his pocket, a bunch of sacred grass—plucked on a holy night—marked the chapter, "*De Preparatione ad Bonam Mortem*." They were watching for this good death, when Luigi Bandello broke through the yellow spurge, growing almost neck-high, and fired, and broke away uncaptured. That spit of lead meant six weeks in hospital for Pippo, and he waited to be revenged.

The third medal! He wished he could see that handsome face of Luigi, the fair curly head, the straight, clear-cut features telling of Greek ancestors in old Syracuse, again at close quarters. They were in his dreams by night, his thoughts by day; yet still the two medals lacked their comrade. One evening his chance came unexpectedly.

He had been at the range under Pellegrino, and had made good practice. "Shoot as straight when you meet Bandello," his officer had said, raising his head from the score-sheet on the wooden table, "and you'll win your third medal, Cerlone." The next shot had missed the bull by half an inch, but there should be no miss when his time came. He strolled

afterwards past the English Gardens. The buzz of approval from the onlookers—his comrades, a few idlers, a muleteer resting his belled and gaily-harnessed beasts at the foot of the zig-zag mountain path—still tickled his esteem. He thought again of Bandello, and, with a sudden jump of the heart, saw the man he wanted.

A 'bus, huge and unwieldy, was blundering through the street. It was now nearly dark, and a spluttering oil lamp lighted the interior. There were half a dozen passengers; that strange mixture of caste and centuries seen in these street vehicles of Palermo. As it rumbled by he saw a vision of shawled women, men in black coats and silk hats, an old peasant, his scarf-bound head, like a ship's figure carved in oak, nodding forward with the jolting of the 'bus. And in another corner was the face that he was seeking.

Or one like it. Pippo wondered for a moment whether long brooding had played tricks at last with his two eyes. And he had not seen very clearly. But it might be Bandello. The lad might have been rash enough to come down from his haunts into the city streets.

Cerlone stopped under the shadow of a house to think. A second omnibus, lumbering along not far behind the first, decided him. He entered it, and from his corner watched the tail-board of the vehicle in front, noting each passenger who dismounted. At last his man dropped off into the road; Cerlone followed cautiously.

His quarry wore the blue hooded cloak of Sicily, excellent for concealment. The *carabiniere*, keeping behind a little cart bright with saints and angels and the wars of Norman Kings, dogged him steadily along the Street of Liberty. Now some gesture seemed to fit in with his memory, and now improbability told him to give up the pursuit. But he followed.

A girl, coming down the road towards Palermo, hurried towards the cloaked man; they stopped a second, and she turned and walked on with him, laughing and chatting. They were quite close now to Sferracavallo. To their right, Monte Pellegrino, rising into a violet sky powdered with stars, shut off the sea. Man and girl, with Pippo following at a cautious distance, reached the broad village street. On the balconies of the houses, on the doorsteps, on ricketty chairs at the thresholds, the villagers smoked or gossiped. Pigs were penned in corrals of rough boulders against the walls.

Pigs, dogs, fowls, rooted and nosed and scratched among offal in the street. At the far end of Sferracavallo the long street twists suddenly and runs downhill to the sea.

Cerlone turned this corner with caution. The two seemed too much interested in their own concerns to heed him, and the hard road was strewn with wind-blown sand that deadened his footsteps. But he drew back suddenly against a wall, as they stopped at a cottage door. A rush of light, as the door opened, showed him clearly enough the face of Luigi Bandello.

The door closed on them abruptly, leaving Pippo in a quandary. What now? He lifted his plumed hat, and ran his fingers dubiously through his thick, close-cut hair. Bandello was in that house. The third medal was in that house. How to get it? That was the question—and a difficult one. To knock, and enter, and attempt arrest single-handed, might be like thrusting one's hand into a nest of wasps. Besides, to help the *Maffiosi* and their friends, allies spring up in Sicily like Jason's men in the quiet and empty field. Pippo remembered an arrest in a busy Palermo street; in a second, sober shopkeepers, law-abiding householders, had had strange accidents with shutters, with stalls, with chairs on overhanging balconies—accidents very hampering to the *carabinieri*. A false step here, and half the village might be in arms against him. But if he went away to bring help, his man might vanish.

He waited some time and then crept cautiously towards the cottage. Through a chink below the blind he peered into the lighted room.

An old woman, yellow and wrinkled, sat spinning yarn. He could hear the whirr of running wheels in the late silence of the street. In another chair, near her—under the light of a flickering oil-lamp—sat the girl who had met Luigi. Her face was young, dimpled, softly rounded; long lashes, over downcast eyes, brushed cheeks that had caught the rich tones of sunshine from the golden valley. Her head was bent over some rich silk stuff, with which her fingers played. Her dark hair showed little shades of colour, little rioting curls and locks, very pleasant to look upon. Pippo had a great eye for the sex. Instinctively a hand went up to the little black moustache. And then, from the momentary abstraction of thought, his mind returned to the reason for his eavesdropping.

Bandello was not there.

Pippo was puzzled, and still watched, expecting that at any moment the man might enter. The elder woman spoke some words that he could not catch, and her daughter glanced up, and answered, laughing. Those eyes of hers! They shone, they sparkled; her little pearl-like teeth glistened; the face, perfect in feature, and curved and rounded almost like a child's, was all animation and delight. But the old woman shook her head solemnly, ominously. He had heard the girl's laugh, like the ripple of silvery water; he heard the tones of the mother's voice—hoarse, warning, like the croak of a raven. He knew, without catching the words, that she was administering some reproof. And instantly the girl's face changed, her eyes narrowed to slits of flame; she broke out in a torrent of angry words; the play of hands, shoulders, mobile features, was grand to watch, and just a trifle frightening. A little spitfire this! Pippo would have liked the taming of her. . . . but *La 'gi*?

The dark lambent eyes flashed towards the window; he drew back hastily, just in time. And then it flashed across him that he had lost his chance. There must be a back exit to the cottage, running to the coast. He hurried down the dipping road on to the beach. A match or two showed footsteps, lost at the limestone of the mountains, that told their own story. Already, no doubt, *Bandello* was far away.

Cursing his folly and ill-luck, *Cerlone* went back to the *Porta Nuova* barracks. But he knew the house, and had his clue, and laid his plans. The next evening he shaved, waxed the little twisted ends of his moustache, and dressed carefully. His uniform might be an asset in the game he meant to play. For some time he eyed himself with satisfaction in the mirror. One or two comrades sniggered, and passed jests which he disregarded loftily. They knew the tale of many of his amours, and he had no objection to this being numbered with the rest.

Eyes bright and impudent and round, like a robin's, looked at their duplicates in the glass. They were eyes, these, that had made many a shy girl's drop at their encounter, and many a bold girl's follow him as he swaggered through the streets. He was taller, more solidly built, than the lithe Sicilian. He was not much older—twenty-four, no more—and had all the assurance of his years.

Above all, he was heart-whole—the girl was attractive,

but held him by no spell. Real indifference—assumed passion—oh, he would have a distinct advantage over any suitor whose tongue was made timid by hot love.

Pippo was a Lombard, and had a wholesome contempt for the natives of the south. But the absurd and antiquated Sicilian courtship presented a somewhat serious obstacle. He had no patience for the night serenade below balcony or cottage window ; the slow process of waved hand, or dropped flower, that led, after delays, to understanding. Besides, he couldn't sing. Must he caterwaul amorous ditties ? He had no very clear plan of campaign when he reached Sferracavallo. But he screwed up courage and whistled a melancholy, tuneless stave, not easily to be recognised as breathing love. There was no response, no curiosity to see the unknown whose fancy had been trapped without knowledge or intention. Pippo left off, with little breath in his body, and a hot suspicion the girl and her mother might be laughing at him within. The window was dark. He walked down to the shore, at a loss for ideas.

But here fortune favoured him. The Signora was staggering from the beach with a heavy basket of driftwood. She stopped on the sandy slope, grunting under the burden. A good proverb came to his mind. "He who wants canes should go to the cane-brake ; he who wants the daughter, should go first to the mother." He volunteered help, and it was accepted a little grudgingly. Little passed between them ; but he learned that the girl had gone into town, and was late in returning. "Always flaunting her finery, eyeing the shops in the Via Macqueda, and leaving the work to her mother." Camilla, the girl's name—Camilla Nardi. So far so good. But he had wasted his breath and his music on an empty house.

It was a fair evening's work for all that, and he strolled a day or two later to the village with a box of candy bulging out of his pocket. Mother and daughter were at their door, on chairs perched beside the stone pigsty. He saluted, and renewed acquaintance. The sun had not yet set, and it was a little difficult to keep from quivering nostrils with the heat drawing out all the flavour of swine and garbage. But he succeeded—and forgot this at last in the excitement of his business. The mother thawed under his attentions and the proffered candy. He told stories of barrack life, of the North ;

was very witty; ingratiated himself by every art he knew; brushed and twirled his moustaches—and all the time, talking to the mother, kept the corner of an eye upon the girl. She sat listless and silent, or, when she looked at him at all, glanced through half-closed eyes. It was tantalising, and put him on his mettle. He tried to draw her into conversation, but received only an absent yes or no. She nibbled candy, though, and that was something to remember.

A few more visits, at wise intervals, yielded better fruit. The mother began to scent some reason for his coming, and proved a useful ally. One day, when Camilla was away, she waxed confidential over her spinning. He talked of the *Maffia* and brigandage in the mountains. Bandello's name came out.

At mention of him, apathy and wrinkled age seemed to fall from the Signora like a garment. She shrugged, she screwed up her face, and at last burst into a torrent against the outlaw. "Bandello?" she cried, with a curse. "I know him. That silly girl of mine has an affair with him. What can I do? We are respectable folk. When my husband was alive——"

He listened to a tale of former grandeur.

"And here am I now," she went on, whining, "terrorised in my own house. He comes and goes when he pleases. I ask her, what good can come of it? Give him up, you say? And have a knife between my ribs—from my own daughter, like enough. Not that Camilla isn't a good girl, mind you. But about this there's no talking to her. Me head's snapped off if I so much as breathe a word. San Rocco! If I could stop it! I tell her there are plenty other good-looking lads in the world——"

She looked straight at Pippo, who gave his moustache another self-conscious turn. Camilla came up at that moment.

Wrought to a pitch, Signora Nardi continued her tirade, in her quick, clipped Sicilian. Camilla's eyes opened wide and flashed, turning at last from her mother to the visitor. Wonderful dark eyes they were, that sent tremors through the length of Pippo's body, for all his self-assurance. He waited for the outburst. To his surprise it did not come. Indeed, when Bandello's name came up again she shrugged her indifference. But she listened intently as Pippo began to speak of his experiences in the mountains. He played a bold game and flung away reticence. What mattered? She was

young and impressionable ; no doubt the brigand's hardihood had first won her heart. But he would cap bravery with bravery. She listened, drinking in every word. Pippo, at questions and encouragement, added a little colour to his exploits. He was humorous, too, in his way. She laughed at his account of old Capponi's capture—the fly-catching mouth, the nodding tassel, the look of blank amazement and testy indignation on wakening—all mimicked cleverly. The mother, highly pleased at his success, laughed too. They all laughed in concert. And the girl's laugh was very merry and young and pleasant. Oh, she was nearly heart-whole. To heal first—to wound afterwards ; there was his plan, cut and dried.

It was some days before he ventured to speak of the third medal. Signora Nardi whispered to him, just before, that Camilla and Luigi must have had a quarrel. He decided then on a bold stroke to test her feelings. "I want Bandello to give me my third medal," he said abruptly, and watched the effect.

Camilla's face showed blank indifference. But when he went she held his hand a little at parting. "I didn't want to talk with mother there," she said. "But—but—oh, he's dangerous to follow, Bandello. He wears a priest's stole, part of it, and they say—"

He interrupted with a gruff laugh at her southern superstition. "A stole? My bullets'll go through any stole, Camilla. I'll have him before long. Look here. If you—but there, no matter." He was afraid of blurting out his proposition. "A priest's stole? We don't believe much in that sort of thing where I live. Nature—*Natura*, what I can see with my eyes—that's what I believe in, and I'm not afraid even of that."

"But be careful, Pippo," breathed Camilla, and for a moment touched his arm.

He went back to barracks in some turmoil of feeling. Poor little Camilla ! It was too bad to use her only as a pawn in his great game. Besides, he was only flesh and blood. This was growing dangerous. Already her face was blotting out Bandello's in his thoughts. Of nights now, he lay awake thinking of Camilla—Camilla laughing, scornful, angry, tender. . . .

The climax came at last. One evening he took mother

and daughter to a little theatre in one of the by-streets of Palermo. It was a play of *burattini*—puppets; but a play intensely serious; a tragedy of love. At first, Pippo's eyes wandered from the doings of the little actors, with their stiff wooden gestures, their wide, fixed eyes, to the clear-cut profile of the girl beside him. He could see her eyes glistening through the smoky darkness, and changing with each emotion—softening, growing dim, hardening, flashing scorn and anger and hatred. The whole stage seemed in those eyes—two mimic stages, copying and mimicking every action as in mirrors. . . . The mother puffed and grunted, partly with the heat, partly with her own emotions, and used her handkerchief freely. . . . But by and by Pippo found his attention fixed on the little figures strutting, fighting, loving, dying, as the hands unseen below pulled the wires. It was cleverly done. They seemed, indeed, the figures which, on the stage of this world, move as unseen Hands ordain. The story was grim enough, fit for the eyes of those dwellers in the battle-field of the south; the dark and tragic land, where corn and vine spring from soil moistened by centuries of massacre and strife and cruelty. Pippo read into the play some of his own purpose. There was a girl who, giving herself freely, was betrayed, deserted. The air was electric with passion. His eyes followed everything. He looked no longer at Camilla; and yet, all through, was conscious of the thrill of her arm against his own. Once, when the betrayer fell under the knife—clattering down in a pathetic, splaying heap of puppet agony—she gasped, and her light fingers tightened on his sleeve.

The curtain came down. Laughing and jesting again, the audience poured out into the street. But Pippo and the girl were very silent. It was still early; there were two performances, and they had gone to the one at Ave Maria, or sunset, in order to reach Sferracavallo in good time. Pippo took his guests to a café on the Marina.

Contempt for himself, and the part he played, made him silent. But as he watched the girl sipping her wine in the light of the lamps, he came to a sudden decision.

Why not? She was beautiful; she loved him—he knew that now, and knew that he loved her. He had not meant an ending like this. But why not? he asked again. They were young; by and by, he would go back to Milan, and

take her with him, away from this cruel and squalid south. He must win his medal first. There was a double reason now why Bandello should be captured. But if she helped him, he could never have the heart to go away and leave her—like the puppet in the play. Oh, he feared no tragic ending. But she was too pretty, too tender, to be flung aside like the pawn when the game is ended, and it has played its part. . . .

Signora Nardi had found a friend, and let the young people walk in front. Violet night enclosed them. In the bay, green and red lights gleamed from the tall ships; Monte Pellegrino rose in darkness before them, and behind them Zafferana crouched like a black camel beneath the sky. Through Palermo the Happy, through the Golden Shell, these two walked, on such a night of Sicily as Theocritus, "in the dim meadows desolate," may still remember with wistful longing. And they were young! Behind them they heard the noisy cackle of Signora Nardi and her friend, and there was significance in her chuckles and in the momentary dropping of her voice. Pippo's love rushed out suddenly, and his proposal.

Camilla caught her breath, but her fingers pressed his sleeve.

"Oh, Pippo! But Luigi Bandello! He'd kill me—I daren't. Even now—even to-night—I'm afraid for having come."

He laughed off her fears eagerly, contemptuously. "Bandello! That dog of a *maffioso*! But listen, Camilla. I've won two medals, I tell you. You shall help me win the third. And then. . . ." He blurted out all his plans for their happiness. "He deserves to die. He's shot I don't know how many, and I've sworn to take him. You shall help, I say. . . . You've told him nothing? You can send him word? And he'll come?"

"Yes, he'll come," said Camilla, and shivered—then nestled closer.

Three nights later, Pippo and Camilla walked together to the shore at Sferracavallo. It was moonlight; the sea all purple and luminous; round the rocky islets in the little bay jets of spray spurted with the wash of waves, and gleamed like silver fountains. The mountains, sombre and austere, looked down on them. Toilers among vines or sea-wrack

had all gone home. Three or four little boats lay canted on the beach, watching them with the painted eyes that look out for dangers of the deep and for happy havens. Camilla shuddered a little. Pippo took her arm and pressed it to his side. Her fingers played with his.

"What's the time, Pippo?" she whispered.

"Ten minutes yet. Be brave, Camilla mine. Only ten minutes—and then—"

"The third medal!"

"The third medal." He kissed her. "Why, you're cold, little one."

"I'm frightened, Pippo. But you won't shoot? You promised me you won't shoot?"

"Not if I can help it. I'll take him alive. You mustn't see nasty work; no, no. How much longer? Five minutes now. Only five minutes—he's punctual—and after that—"

He drew her to him, and while she nestled close, whispered about all that third medal meant; money, promotion, a cosy home for both of them, perhaps, in that bustling city of the north that looked towards the Alpine snows. He whispered, as if the little boats had ears as well as eyes. At last she pushed him from her. "Go, go, Pippo. In there. It must be nearly time."

He snatched a kiss, and waited in a cleft of the mountain wall, his eyes fixed on the beach running towards Tonnara. But they wandered now and then to Camilla, standing in moonlight on the threshold of the sea. The light foam of the waves flecked her little feet. Suddenly she moved, glanced round her, like a bird; for a second a finger was on her lips, and her other hand motioned to him to keep concealed.

"Pippo! Pippo!" she whispered in a minute. "The third medal!"

He ran out, his carbine ready. Where was Bandello? He strained his eyes; every nerve was alert.

"Pippo! Pippo! The third medal!"

At the taunting voice behind him—like an echo, loud and sinister, of her whisper—Pippo wheeled round. There was a jet of fire in the moonlight, a sharp report; hollow echoes rolled among the mountains. He stood rocking and swaying for a moment, not understanding. Camilla ran up from the brink of the sea. She stood in front of him, her glowing eyes half-shut, her forehead puckered; and the tip of her

tongue was caught between her teeth, in curiosity, in suspense. Pippo's carbine dropped on to the shingle. There stood Bandello, smoking weapon still in hand—Bandello, come behind, from Palermo, from under the dark shelter of the mountains.

"Camilla!" With one cry, Pippo fell and lay huddled on the beach, like the puppet on the tragic stage. He stared out at them, there in the moonlight, with fixed, glazing eyes, like the eyes of the wooden puppet.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Camilla, and shuddered. Luigi's arm circled her waist. Pippo's face looked strangely handsome, strangely softened, in the moonlight. "But he would have killed you, Luigi—he meant to kill you," she whispered. And then her mood changed, and she clapped her hands together, like a child who has won some game.

"Look, Luigi! Look! His third medal—there!"

She pointed to where the dark blood, staining the breast, marked the place of the third medal.

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

Chinese Girl

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THE CHINESE GIRL

I

IT was in the smoke-room of the *Van Buren* coming from Surabaya that I met Mr. Arthur Amrod.

Mr. Amrod's business in life was not written upon him; given a guess you would have said he was a rubber man or a tobacco planter up from Banjermasin or Timor; in reality he was (and is) chief of the Tavas agency which deals with 'private investigation' in the Far East. It is, in fact, a detective agency working in with all the Governments; international in its scope and reducible in its ultimate analysis to Amrod.

He is It.

A great deal of what is true and false has been written about detectives and their work. I asked Amrod when I got to know him what in his opinion was the quality most necessary in this business, and he answered me:

'The quality of application, same as in any other business; also, of course, the quality of not being a fool.' He laughed, then he went on: 'Also it is useful to speak and understand, if possible, all the known languages; if not, certainly the six major languages of each hemisphere; also it is useful to know everything that it is useful to know if you are dealing with that mixture of *homo ferox* and *homo sapiens* --the criminal.'

"And that is everything?"

"Includes everything knowable, from the atomic weight of arsenic to the dynamic properties of--well, well, one talks and talks. Put it shortly, that all knowledge is useful to the crime investigator and that the most essential branch of knowledge to him is the knowledge of men and women. That is good common sense.

"As for human nature, a man in my position and way

of life soon comes to know that there is Eastern human nature as well as Western. The Eastern man and woman are not quite the same basically as the Western man and woman. I have heard men dispute that, saying that all humanity is essentially the same. My mind, which is also my case book, disputes that."

He called the Java boy who looked after the smoke-room and wrote a chit for an onion cocktail; and as I looked at him it came to me that I would give a good deal to open that case book he spoke of and read some of the stories it undoubtedly contained. On the long run to Southampton this pleasure was given to me. Every man likes to talk of his hunting to appreciative ears, and in the smoke-room, on the spar-deck, or the hinder-deck when the children were abed, or leaning on the after-rail watching the stern wash by the light of the Indian Ocean stars the locked case book of Mr. Amrod would often open to the key of judicious questioning.

There were stories, alas! that cannot be told—incidents of his hunting that I hope to make stories of some day—and tales of his relationship with strange people like that which follows, and which I hope may amuse you.

This is the story he told.

I always take a Dutch ship when I cannot get an English one, that is to say, when a Dutch ship is procurable.

There is no difficulty that way east of 95 deg. and west of Papua, for you have the *Nederland* ships and heaven knows what other ships all stamped "Amsterdam" to choose from.

A man said to me at Sandabar, "If you are going home next month and haven't booked your passage, go in the *Hague*; she doesn't roll, and she's Dutch, good grub, and you will meet more interesting people than you will on the English boats."

That was many years ago, when I was young in the East, and I found the advice had been worth taking, but, though the food was good enough in that special ship, the company was for the most part uninteresting.

I was very young in those days, not more than twenty, and I had not yet entered on my present career and knew little of the world and its ways, especially the world that lies beneath the coloured and glittering surface of the East,

I was not a man given to looking after girls, but there was a girl on board *Hague* that made me turn my head.

I saw her on the day I embarked. She was not a European, at least if she had any European blood in her veins it was not dominant; she was, in fact, and as I afterwards learned, Chinese on her father's side.

A touch of the Chinese sometimes makes for beauty, and I knew it as I stood there when she had cast her eyes on me and withdrawn them after they had lingered just a second too long.

You will say I am going to tell you a love story. I am—the only affair of love I have ever experienced and a story worth telling, I think—though not for that reason. However, you will judge for yourself.

She was standing beside a woman of Dutch type, her companion, as I afterwards found out, and as they moved away through the crowd of people who were embarking, led by a steward who was evidently showing them to their cabin, I followed them with my eyes and saw that he was taking them to one of the double cabins on the boat deck. Evidently well-to-do people, not second-class anyway, and I remember thinking with a sort of satisfaction that, travelling in the same class as we were, I might have a chance of making a closer acquaintance with that girl. Then I went into the smoke-room.

II

In the smoke-room was sitting Mynheer Pel, a man I knew, who was going home to Rotterdam on a holiday, and there he was, very hot and flustered after the recovery of a bag which the stowage officer had sent down to the hold instead of to his cabin. He was having a vermouth with a drop of Schiedam, and I joined him, and he said how glad he was I was coming along on the voyage, and then he questioned me about my luggage. He was one of those fatherly men, never happier than when telling others how things should be done, notwithstanding that he often made a mess of his own affairs—witness that bag which had been mis-stowed owing to his own fault in not having it labelled "Cabin." Then he questioned me about my prospects and what I was going to do in Europe. I had known him in a

business way and met him at the club, and he had never shown much inquisitiveness as to my affairs. It was the ship that brought out this side of him. People on board ship are different from people ashore; on board ship people take an added interest in others and extraordinary mushroom friendships spring to life that die and vanish at the first sight of land.

It is a strong friendship that comes through the Customs House, the struggle with porters and the scramble for the waiting train at the port of debarkation. But there was one point about Mynheer Pel that was both instructive and amusing. This seeming gossip never gave away anything of his own affairs, though his own affairs ought to have been interesting enough, seeing that he had made a fortune out of rubber and was reckoned to be making a fortune out of tin—neither did he ever speak of other people except in general terms or terms of praise—a very cautious man whose maxim was evidently “Least said soonest mended.”

Then as the shore-fasts were cast off and the engines began to shake the ship the smoke-room began to fill up, mostly Dutch, and Mynheer Pel, who seemed to know everybody, turned his attention to others than myself.

III

I saw my fascinating girl at dinner. She and her companion occupied a little table on the right of the doorway of the saloon.

As I was seated at the first officer's table, however, I had little chance of watching her closely or making my interest in her felt by glance or expression; I had, in fact, to half turn my head to see her at all; but the glimpses I did catch did not lessen in the least the feeling that had begun to blossom in my breast.

She was, in fact, very lovely, and all the more lovely by contrast with her dowdy companion, who had even disdained to put on evening dress—a regular Dutch hausfrau-looking woman, but with an air of authority and decision that proclaimed her a Somebody.

I noticed, indeed, that the Java attendants were especially obsequious to her. Yes, evidently a Somebody, but all the

same a nobody for me, whose eyes were entirely taken up by her companion.

The girl was not in evening dress like some of the Dutch women who were exhibiting their somewhat too ample charms. She wore a sort of Eastern scarf as only an Eastern woman could wear it, and no jewellery that I could see.

That somehow pleased me. Absurd, isn't it, that I should have taken an interest in her amounting to that? Well, not so absurd perhaps, considering her fascination and that glance which had seemed for a moment to rest favourably upon me—and my youth.

Just at the end of dinner I happened to look round. She was rising from table and about to follow her companion. Our eyes met, and held for a second, then she was gone.

Shortly after I left the saloon and came upstairs to the music-room, where the coffee-table was laid out. The place was soon crowded, but my girl was not there, neither she nor her companion. The band was playing, but I had no ears for the band nor for the conversation of Mynheer Pel. I took a cigar and went on deck and contemplated the moon that was rising over the sea. The moon, that chosen companion of lovers and the love-sick throughout the ages.

IV

They say that when a Negro takes the measles he takes it worse than a white because his system has not been made used to it by custom.

I expect it is the same with love and the young. At all events love, from my short experience of it, is a disease, if mind upset, unrest and sleeplessness are symptomatic of disease.

I tell you I could not keep still. In the morning I was on the lower deck after an early breakfast, looking at the sea, and then in a minute I was crawling up the ladder to the boat deck. Here I got a seat from which I could see the door of her cabin, and I was rewarded for half an hour's watch in the hot sun by seeing a steward go in with a tray with breakfast things on it, evidently for two.

She was breakfasting in her cabin with her companion, and another half hour's watch in the broiling sun rewarded me with a sight of the companion.

The stout, plain woman came out of the cabin in a dressing-

gown, went to the rail of the deck and stood for a moment with her hands on it and her eyes taking in the moving sea. Then she went back to the cabin and shut the door.

Such are the rewards of love.

Tricks—I tell you Nature is one great bag of tricks and the biggest trick in the bag is the one that makes men make fools of themselves in this way. Have you ever thought that this thing called passionate love—so obviously a device of Nature's for a set purpose—not only traps the unfortunates who chance to step on its mechanism but induces quite cold-blooded lookers-on to sing hymns in its praise and to see nothing at all ridiculous in the antics of the trapped ones, whether those antics take the form of guitar playing, money squandering, assassination, or simply sitting like a fool gazing at a cabin doorway?

In the late afternoon down on the lower deck she appeared, seated in a chair and with a fan in her hand, and I who had been on the watch for her so long, did I dare to approach her? Indeed no. I could not have walked along the deck in front of her for worlds. It is a strange psychological fact that a person seated has, to a person standing, a superior and critical position. He feels that the seated one has him calmly under review, that the seated one is the audience and he the actor.

At all events, I could not have paraded before the girl with the fan for worlds, so I leaned against the rail at a distance and watched her unobtrusively as she sat there stretched in her chair beside her inevitable companion, fan in hand and eyes that seemed fixed across the blue sea, a sea now dark as wine beneath the late afternoon light.

Once I thought she glanced in my direction as though conscious of my presence, and again that fat companion of hers turned her face towards me—had they by chance been discussing me? I turned away and leaned over the rail, and now as I watched the lift of the swell and the flight of a flying-fish bright as an arrow-head of silver, the timid rabbit that had been me suddenly took heart and cunning and courage.

No, I could not walk before her to be criticised; but why not go up and speak to her?

At least go up and speak to her companion, pretend that I thought I had met her before, apologise for my mistake, and then fall into conversation about the voyage.

I would walk along the deck till close to them, then start as though in recognition, hesitate, take off my hat and say : " Ah, good-day, what a pleasure to meet you here," speaking in Dutch. She looked Dutch.

Well, yes, that seemed all right, but what name should I put on her—Van Houten? Van Dunck?—no, Reuter—yes, that was a likely and easy name. The thing was quite simple. Explaining, I would say that she was exactly like a woman I had met at Sandabar, at Mynheer Capelman's house. I had a friend of that name in Sandabar.

The thing was quite simple. Though ugly and gross-looking she did not seem unamiable—yet though the plan was formed with the decision to execute it, I still hung off for a moment.

It is a very brave man that enters a dentist's house without a pause on the doorstep, but it was only the pause of a moment.

Suddenly casting thought to the winds and with the coolness and aplomb of an old man of the world, I turned and came along the deck past the people seated in their deck chairs smoking and dozing or reading.

Then, having reached the appointed spot, off went my hat, followed by my little speech.

" I do not know you, sir," said the woman.

The girl said nothing. After a quick look up at me her eyes fell again to the contemplation of her fan.

I knew that she knew it was for her I had stopped, and for her I had received this rebuff, for the Dutch woman's face was a rebuff, to say nothing of her tone. A tone severe and hard that said—oh, in this social world of ours so little can say so much—" I do not want to know you ; it is this young girl, my companion, you are after. You shall not speak to her—good-day."

I apologised and passed on feeling like a fool.

V

And yet the girl had not rebuffed me, nay, I knew, or rather guessed, in some curious way that I appealed to her—there is such a thing as telepathy—and that this daring

of the dragon who guarded her from the advances of the male sex had raised me in her eyes, not lowered me.

The smoke-room opened off the lower deck. I went in and ordered a cocktail to pull myself together, and I said to myself:

"Damn that old cat—I'll be even with her yet, but I must get help. Either out of my own mind and my own cunning or from someone else. Surely there is someone on board who knows her. I have seen her talking to several people. When she was going out of the saloon last night she stopped to say a word to a man who was leaving at the same time—well, well—let's think."

VI

Just at that moment into the smoke-room came Mynheer Pel.

He came and sat at the same table with me and ordered a drink.

The *Hague* was due to stop at Macassar on the morrow, and he asked me was I going on shore. He had been talking to the captain, who had told him it would be a twenty-four hours stop as there was cargo to be taken on, and he said nearly everybody would be going on shore. He proposed that we should go and stop at the Bay Hotel and dine and stay the night; and I agreed provisionally. I said, "I think I'll come, but I'll let you know when we get there. Don't count on me, for at the last moment I may decide to stick to the ship."

Meaning that if the girl was going on shore I would go, if not, not.

"Well, you can please yourself," said Pel, and then he began to talk of the bad ventilation of his cabin, which didn't interest me, and of the superior ventilation of the cabins on the boat deck—which did.

"Tell me," I said, "have you noticed a very pretty girl tied to an awful old woman? They have a cabin on the boat deck."

"Yes," said Pel. "She's an Asiatic."

"Do you know them?"

"Only by sight, not to speak to," said he.

"Well," said I—and then I said a lot. In fact, I said as

much as a man can say to another on a subject like that—enough, anyhow, to let him see how deeply I was smitten, and he listened in his heavy way and then, as usual with him, he began to give advice. Why, the man had mislabelled his luggage and he had not even taken the precaution to book a cabin on the port side to be sure of good ventilation, yet he must begin giving me advice on the conduct of my emotions!

“Young man,” said Pel, “I have seen a good deal of the East, and I have never seen any happiness resulting from the mixture of the races, and when men come out from the West for the first time I always make it my duty to warn them against entanglements.”

“You would,” thought I.

“I will tell you something about mixed marriages,” he went on. “The manager of the Sampong Company—a young man with good prospects, good health, and fair ability, but an Asiatic—married an English girl. I never mention names or talk of other peoples’ affairs if I can help it, but, still, there are affairs that serve as a warning to others and to hint of them is not gossip.

“Well, this man whom I will not name became acquainted with and married a girl belonging to a good business family, English, and for some months they seemed happy enough. And so things would have gone on, no doubt, had the man been European. But he was Asiatic, and suddenly he conceived in his heart a violent jealousy against another man, an absolutely reasonless jealousy.

“This other man had been a great friend of his wife’s before marriage, and since the friendship was innocent, why should it not continue?

“Just so; from an ordinary sane European point of view there was no reason why it should not, but this Asiatic gentleman was not a sane European. He brooded on the matter and tried witchcraft—it all came out at the trial—and witchcraft failing, he just took a dagger and one night after a ball, as the guests were leaving, he stabbed the other man but failed to kill him. Well, he is now in the penitentiary and will be there for fifteen years more. Can you fancy the position of the wife, who is still alive and with a young child to look after?”

“No,” I said, “I can’t, and I don’t want to. You are

arguing from a particular instance, just as an Eastern, coming to Europe and going into a divorce court, might argue that all European marriages were failures."

"I am arguing from knowledge and common sense," said Pel, "and I could quote instances that occur all over these islands. Why, look you, do you see that man sitting by the door? That is Klinkert, and he could give you instances enough of the peculiarities of the East. He is an official of Macassar, a lively place, as you will see to-morrow. They tell me he has been hunting the islands for a Dyak maid-servant of thirteen who ran off with her mistress's jewellery and also for a delightful woman who killed her husband with powdered glass. And if you were to ask him he'd no doubt give you other instances and cases bearing on Eastern mentality and its little peculiarities."

I didn't quarrel with him, for I thought he might be useful on the morrow, though how I could not yet quite see, but it seemed to me that these opinionated people are the most easy to flatter and that by the gentle art of flattery I might bring him to my side and make him an assistant in my plans.

VII

When you asked me as to the qualities necessary for detective work I said application, which is, in other words, attention to business.

I have that quality, and I had it in those days, though my business then was, for the moment, simply love-making.

I lay awake that night devising ways and means. I had determined that, come what might, I was going to talk to that girl and get to know her, with the full belief in my mind that my passion for her would not be lessened by knowledge, and the curious fact appeared that all Pel's talk about the women of the East and all his good advice, so far from putting me off, increased my determination. If they left the ship at Southampton, for which I was bound, well and good; if they went on to Amsterdam, I would go on too.

That was me in those days, and that is me still—ceaseless pursuit of the object I am pursuing—in other words, attention to business raised to the *n*th power.

I must tell you that when I am working on a case I devote part of my energies to the building of plans of action to suit possible developments, and that night I was building plans to meet all contingencies.

The companion being evidently Dutch, it was a hundred to one they would be going on to Amsterdam, and there, despite himself, Pel might be useful; also during the long voyage across the Indian Ocean and through the Red Sea and Mediterranean there would be sure to be chances. I determined to make friends with the officers of the ship and so on.

Then I fell asleep and awoke to find the *Hague* at the wharf of Macassar.

Now the terrible thing that happened to me, the thing that one might compare to an accident affecting the soul and leaving it with a dead spot towards certain things, was like this:

Pel, whom I met at early breakfast in the saloon, was full of the prospect of his trip ashore. In some ways he was like a great boy. He had got on his best clothes and his best spirits, and he infected me with his *joie de vivre*, a joy, alas! destined for swift extermination. The shore scents and sounds and glimpses through the open portholes helped, and I agreed to go with him and not to wait, as I had intended, on the chance of the girl remaining behind and being more accessible when the others were gone—I had the long voyage before me to make good in.

I put some night things in a bag and presently found myself with Pel among the crush of passengers at the gangway.

The girl was going ashore with the others, she and her companion. I pushed up till I was right behind her, and as I did so I heard Pel whispering to me excitedly, with the excitement of suddenly gotten news, something about powdered glass.

Then I saw that the girl's left wrist was manacled to the right wrist of her companion.

Klinkert was walking behind them.

A. J. ALAN

My Adventure at Chiseldonst

The Fair

MY ADVENTURE AT CHISELHURST

TOWARDS the end of last September I went to the Radio Exhibition at Olympia, and very fine it was, too. I drifted about, and after I'd, so to speak, "done" the ground floor and was going up the stairs to the gallery, I ran into a man I knew. Just at the moment it wouldn't do at all for me to mention his name, so I'll merely call him James, but there's no harm in saying that he was a retired stockbroker and he lived near Chiselhurst.

Anyhow, there he was, and he hailed me with glee and insisted on our walking round together. I was rather sorry about this because it's so much more fun wandering about exhibitions by oneself, and not only that, he was evidently starting a bad cold which didn't attract me particularly, but there was no getting out of it without offending him, so I didn't try.

After all, he was by way of being a friend of mine and I'd known him for ages, but we hadn't come across each other for some months, and during this time he'd gone and got married again, unexpected-like. I mean, everyone had come to look on him as a chronic widower, and he'd have probably stopped so if the daughter who kept house for him hadn't got married herself and gone to live in Birmingham. You must excuse these details, but I want you to understand exactly what the position was. At things were, he hadn't seen the catch of running an enormous great house all by himself, so Mrs. James the Second had come to the throne as a matter of course. I had never actually met her, but from all accounts she was a great success.

James was so keen on telling me about how happy he was, and so on, that it was quite a job to make him take any interest in the show, but whenever he did deign to look at or listen to anything he merely said it wasn't a patch on some rotten super-bet he'd brought back from the United States. (They'd

spent their honeymoon there for some unknown reason.) I naturally wasn't going to stand this sort of thing for long, so I upped and made a few remarks about American super-hets which were very well received by adjacent stall-holders. The remarks themselves weren't, perhaps, of general interest, but they landed me with a challenge. This was to dine with him that evening, hear his set, and incidentally, meet his new wife. I hadn't got an excuse ready, so I said that I should be charmed to meet his wife and, incidentally, hear his new set.

It so happened that my car was in dock for two days and James said he'd call for me at home and run me down. The question then arose as to whether I should dress first or take a bag down with me. That doesn't sound important, I know, but it had a good deal to do with something that happened afterwards. As a matter of fact I decided to change at home.

I left James at the Exhibition during the afternoon, he duly picked me up at my place at half-past six or thereabouts, and we got down to Chiselhurst just before seven.

We were met by the news that Mrs. James wasn't in. She'd apparently taken out her own car during the morning and gone off to see her mother who lived at Worthing and was a bit of an invalid. As this was a thing she'd been in the habit of doing every two or three weeks it was nothing out of the way, but she usually got back earlier.

At all events, pending her return, we went through the hall into the lounge, where people generally sat, and James began mixing cocktails. While he was doing this I had a look round to see how much had been altered under the new management, as one would. The only unfamiliar object in the room seemed to be a large picture hanging over the mantelpiece. I was just strolling across to get a better view (it was getting a bit dark by this time), when James said: "Half a sec," and he switched on some specially arranged lights round the frame which showed it up, properly. Then he said: "What do you think of my wife?"

Well, I looked at it and said: "Gosh! If that's at all like her she must be one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen," and that's saying a lot. The portrait was by quite a well-known man and he'd painted her exactly full face and looking straight at you. You don't often see that because so few people can stand it. The general effect was so realistic that one almost felt one was being introduced and ought

to say something. She was fair rather than dark, a little bit Scandinavian in appearance, and I put her down as a shade over thirty.

James finished mixing the cocktails and gave me mine, and then he took his up with him to dress, leaving me sitting in an arm-chair facing the fireplace—and the picture.

He couldn't have got further than the top of the stairs when the telephone bell in the hall rang and he came running down to answer it. It was evidently his wife at the other end, and judging from what he said, she was explaining that she was stuck at Worthing for the night owing to some trouble with the car. Nothing serious.

(He told me afterwards that she'd first of all had a bad puncture and then found that the inner tube of the spare wheel was perished. The delay would have meant her driving part of the way home in the dark, which she didn't like.)

After that the question of his cold cropped up. She must have asked after it because I heard him say it wasn't any better. They talked about it for a bit and then lapsed into the sloppy type of conversation which one sort of expects between newly married people, but which is none the less averagely dull for anyone else to listen to.

It may have been more than averagely dull in this case because it almost sent me off to sleep. It didn't quite, but I got as far as the moment when the sub-conscious side of the brain begins to take control and you sometimes get entirely fantastic ideas. (Either that or you try to hoof the end of the bed off.) Anyhow, if you remember, I was sitting looking at this brightly illuminated picture of Mrs. James. Well, for an incredibly short space of time, I mean, you've no idea how short, the whole character of it seemed to change. Instead of an oil painting in rather vivid colours it suddenly looked like a photograph, or, to be strictly accurate, a photograph as reproduced in a newspaper. Try looking at one through a magnifying glass (not now—sometime), and imagine it to be four feet by three, and you will get the same effect that I did. There was a name printed under this photograph and my eyes certainly read it, but before my mind could take in what it was the illusion was gone and I was wide-awake again.

It was all over so quickly that I just said: "Um, that's funny," and didn't pay much attention to it.

When James came in after a lengthy and idiotic good-bye on the telephone I didn't even tell him. He'd have only made some fatuous joke about the strength of his cocktails.

He was full of apologies about his wife not being able to get home and so forth, and he explained what had happened with yards of detail. I'd gathered most of it already but I had to pretend to listen with interest so as to make him think I hadn't heard some of the other things that had been said. He then went up finally to dress and again left me alone with the picture, but although I tried from every angle, both with and without the lights, I couldn't manage to recapture the peculiar "half-tone" effect, neither was I able to remember the name which had appeared underneath. By the way, it is worth noting that if I'd decided to dress at Chiselmurst instead of at home I probably shouldn't have been left alone with the picture at all, and got the jim-jams about it.

James came down in due course and we had a most elaborate dinner. He always did things very well and there was no reason why he shouldn't. People with five thousand a year often do.

At the end of dinner we carted our coffee and old brandy into the lounge, and then he introduced me to his unspeakable wireless set. I hadn't spotted it earlier because it was housed in a tall-boy which had always been there.

Needless to say, the tall-boy was far and away the best thing about it. When he switched it on the volume of distorted noise was so appalling that I can't think why the ceiling didn't come down.

There was a long and terrible period during which we could only converse by means of signs, and then to my great relief one of his transformers caught fire and we had to put it out with a soda-water syphon.

By then it was getting on for eleven and I said it was time to go. That, of course, meant a final whisky, and he was just starting on his, which he'd mixed with milk, by the way, when he put it down and said: "My word! I shall hear about it if I don't take my aspirin," and he went upstairs to fetch some. He was gone three or four minutes, and when he came down he said he'd had the devil's own hunt, as he couldn't find any of his own and he'd been obliged to bag his wife's last three. These he proceeded to take, and then

I really had to go as there was only just time to catch my train, and that was that.

Next morning, during breakfast, there was a ring at the bell, and they came and told me that Inspector Soames of Chiselhurst wanted to see me, so I went out and interviewed him.

He seemed quite a decent fellow, and he led off by enquiring how I was. I thanked him and said I was very well indeed. He next wanted to know if I'd slept well, and I told him that I had, but even then he wasn't happy. Was I sure I'd felt no discomfort of any kind during the night? I said: "None whatever, but why this sudden solicitude about my health?"

He then said: "Well, you see, sir, it's like this. Last night you dined with Mr.—er—(well—James, in fact). You left him round about 11 p.m., and he presumably went straight to bed. However, at three o'clock this morning groans were heard coming from his room, and when the servants went in they found him lying half in and half out of bed, writhing with pain and partially unconscious. Doctors were immediately called in and they did all they could, but by six o'clock he was dead." Well, this was naturally a great shock to me. It always is when you hear of people whom you know going out suddenly like that, especially when you've seen them alive and well such a little time before.

I asked the Inspector what James had died of, and he said: "Oh, probably some acute form of food poisoning," but it wouldn't be known for certain until after the post-mortem. In the meantime, would I mind telling him everything we had had to eat and drink the night before? Which I did. Actually it was only a check, because he'd already got it all down in his notebook. I dare say he'd been talking to the cook and the maids who'd waited on us. He even knew that I hadn't had any fish, whereas James had, but there was nothing wrong with that as it had all been finished downstairs. I was able to be more helpful in the matter of drinks afterwards, and I didn't forget to mention the final whisky and milk and the three aspirins, all of which he carefully wrote down.

I next enquired after Mrs. James. It had apparently been rather distressing about her. They'd telephoned to Worthing as soon as they'd found how gravely ill James was, and she'd arrived home just as he was dying. No one had had the *nous*

to be on the look-out for her at the front door, and she'd got right up into the room and seen how things were before they could stop her. She had then completely collapsed, which was only natural, and they'd had to carry her to her room and put her to bed. Things were so bad with her that there was talk of a nurse being sent for.

My inspector friend then went away, but he warned me that I should have to appear at the inquest, which would probably be three days later.

I duly turned up but wasn't called. They only took evidence of identification and the proceedings were adjourned for three weeks to await the result of the post-mortem.

I wrote to Mrs. James soon afterwards asking if there was anything I could do, but she sent back a rather vague note about being too ill to see anyone, so we didn't meet.

I had another interview with the police after that, but they didn't ask me any more questions about food, and when the adjourned inquest came on it was perfectly obvious why. The cause of James's death was food poisoning at all. It was fifty grains of perchloride of mercury. In case you don't know, perchloride of mercury is also called corrosive sublimate (it's used in surgical dressings), and fifty grains taken internally is a pretty hopeless proposition. In fact, according to what the very eminent pathologist person said in the witness-box, it must be about as good for your tummy as molten lead. This great man went on to give it as his opinion that the poison must have been administered not more than eight hours before death had taken place. This was allowing for the milk which would have a retarding influence. As James had died at six in the morning it meant that he must have taken his dose sometime after ten o'clock the previous night. As I had been the last person to see him alive, or at any rate conscious, it made my evidence rather important, especially as it covered the first hour of the material eight.

When my turn came I told the Court almost word for word what I'd told the Inspector, right down to the three aspirins.

The Coroner asked me a whole lot of questions about James's manner and health, and I could only say that he had seemed normal, cheerful, and, bar his cold, healthy.

When they'd done with me, Mrs. James was called, and I

was able to see her properly for the first time. She was even better looking than her portrait, and black suited her. One could tell that she had the sympathy of everyone. She would. She was popular in the district, and the court was packed with her friends. The Coroner treated her with the utmost consideration. She said that her relations with her husband had always been of the very best and there had never been the ghost of a disagreement. She also stated that as far as she knew he had no worries, either financial or otherwise, and that he could have had no possible reason for taking his life.

After that the Coroner became even more considerate than ever. One could see what he was after; he clearly had the fact in mind that when a rich man dies in mysterious circumstances there are always plenty of people who seem to think that his widow ought to be hanged "on spec," so, although their evidence was hardly—what shall I say?—germane to the enquiry, witnesses were called who proved, in effect, that she had been at Worthing from lunch-time on the one day right up to four in the morning on the next, and there was no getting away from it. Even the mechanic from the Worthing garage was roped in (in his Sunday clothes). He described the trouble with her tyres and the discussion as to whether she could or could not have got home to Chiselhurst before dark.

There was a good deal more evidence of the same kind, and it all went to establish that whatever else had happened, Mrs. James couldn't possibly have murdered her husband, and as it seemed unlikely that he had committed suicide the jury returned an open verdict.

Now what was I to do? On the face of it, and knowing what I did, it was my duty to get up and say something like this: "You'll pardon me, but that woman *did* murder her husband and, if you like, I'll tell you roughly how: She waits till he has a cold coming on and then decides to pay one of her periodical visits to her mother at Worthing. She arranges to get hung up there for the night, but she telephones at dinner-time and, I suggest, makes him promise to take some aspirin and whisky before he goes to bed—a perfectly normal remedy. She naturally takes jolly good care before starting in the morning that there *are* only three tablets of aspirin that he can get at and these are the—er—

ones. The bottle they have been in is certainly a danger if the police get hold of it, but they don't get hold of it because she arrives home in plenty of time to change it for another.

"If things had gone entirely right for her, and I hadn't happened to be dining there that evening, no one would have known about James's dose of aspirin at all, but her technique is so sound that I'm able to watch him take it, and talk about it afterwards without it mattering. I don't suppose she liked it, but it didn't do her any appreciable harm. Then again, even if he forgets to take his tablets she runs no risk. She merely has to wait till he gets another cold. In fact the whole thing is cast iron."

Now supposing, for the sake of argument, that I'd got up, and been allowed to say all this, what would have happened?

I should have had to admit straight off that I couldn't produce a scrap of evidence to support any of it, at least not the kind of evidence that would wash with a jury.

There certainly was James's remark: "*I shall hear about it if I don't take my aspirin.*" That satisfied *me* who he expected to hear about it from, but there was only my bare word for it that he'd put it that way, and you know what lawyers are. They mightn't have believed me.

Then again, the Coroner was a doctor. He would have asked me how it was possible to fake up perchloride of mercury to look like aspirin, and I should have had to agree that it wouldn't be at all easy. It happens to be a poison which the general public practically can't get, and even if they could, the tablets in which it is sold are carefully dyed blue. Besides which they aren't the right shape. If you walked into a chemist's and asked him to bleach some of them white and make them to look like aspirin he might easily think it fishy, and I doubt whether you would set his mind at rest by saying that you only wanted them for a joke, or private theatricals.

All of this I knew quite well, having taken the trouble to enquire, but there was another fact which I didn't get to know till afterwards which might have made a difference. It was rather strange. For a certain time during the War the French Army medical people had put up their perchloride of mercury in *white* tablets, not blue, and these did in fact closely resemble the present-day aspirin. Moreover, each tablet contained seventeen grains. Now three seventeens

are fifty-one, or almost exactly what James was reckoned to have taken. But all this would have gone for precisely nothing (even if I'd known it and said it), unless any of these convenient tablets could be traced to Mrs. James, and they most definitely couldn't.

The police had searched the house as a matter of routine and analysed every bottle whether empty or full. One might also safely conclude that they had made enquiries at all the chemists where the lady might have dealt. I know they went to mine.

Then there was another thing which made it difficult to accuse Mrs. James, and that was the absence of motive, because the obvious one, money, was practically ruled out. It transpired that she had twelve hundred a year of her own, and the average woman with as much as that isn't likely to marry and then murder some wretched man for the sake of another five thousand. She wouldn't take the trouble. In fact, what with one thing and another, my theory didn't stand a hope, so I thought I'd let it stew a little longer.

The lady left the court without a stain on her character and later on went to live in the Isle of Wight. For all I know she is still there, enjoying her twelve hundred plus five thousand a year, but whether she will go on doing it is quite another thing, because :

A short time ago I was just finishing a pipe before going to bed, when suddenly, apropos of nothing, there came into my head the name I had seen under her picture at the instant it had looked like a photograph. It was a somewhat peculiar name and not the one under which she had married James.

All the same, one doesn't imagine a name for no reason at all, so I worked it out that at some time or other I must have actually seen a published photograph of Mrs. James, and that staring at the picture down at Chiselhurst had brought it back to me.

Anyhow, the following day I got my literary agent to send round to all the newspaper offices in Fleet Street and enquire whether a photograph of anyone of this name had appeared during the last few years. They all said "No."

However, my agent is of a persevering nature (he has to be). He went on and tackled the illustrated weekly papers and he struck oil almost at once. About eight years ago one of them had apparently brought out what it called a

"Riviera Supplement," and in it was *the* photograph. I went along and recognised it immediately, but what interested me most of all was the paragraph that referred to it. It said that this Miss What's-her-name had been acting as companion to an old lady who had a villa at Cannes. One day she, the companion, had gone across into Italy to see her mother who lived at Bordighera and was a bit of an invalid.

For some reason or other she missed the last train back and had to spend the night at Bordighera, but when she did arrive back at Cannes next day she was shocked to find that her employer had poisoned herself during the night.

The paper didn't say what poison the old lady took or how much money she left her companion, but I've found out since and I'll give you two guesses.

THE HAIR

I'M going to give you an account of certain occurrences. I shan't attempt to explain them because they're quite beyond me. When you've heard all the facts, some of you may be able to offer suggestions. You must forgive me for going into a certain amount of detail. When you don't understand what you're talking about it's so difficult to know what to leave out.

This business began in the dark ages, before there was any broadcasting. In fact, in 1921.

I'd been staying the week-end with a friend of mine who lives about fifteen miles out of Bristol.

There was another man stopping there, too, who lived at Dawlish. Well, on the Monday morning our host drove us into Bristol in time for the Dawlish man to catch his train, which left a good deal earlier than the London one. Of course, if old Einstein had done his job properly, we could both have gone by the same train. As it was, I had over half an hour to wait. Talking of Einstein, wouldn't it be almost worth while dying young so as to hear what Euclid says to him when they meet—wherever it is?

There was a funny little old sort of curiosity shop in one of the streets I went down, and I stopped to look in the window. Right at the back, on a shelf, was a round brass box, not unlike a powder-box in shape, and it rather took my fancy. I don't know why—perhaps it was because I'd never seen anything quite like it before. That must be why some women buy some hats.

Anyway, the shop window was so dirty that you could hardly see through it, so I went inside to have a closer look. An incredibly old man came out of the back regions and told me all he knew about the box, which wasn't very much. It was fairly heavy, made of brass, round, four inches high, and about three inches in diameter. There was something inside it, which we could hear when we shook it, but no one

had ever been able to get the lid off. He'd bought it from a sailor some years before, but couldn't say in the least what part of the world it came from.

"What about fifteen bob?"

I offered him ten, and he took it very quickly, and then I had to sprint back to the station to catch my train. When I got home I took the box up into my workshop and had a proper look at it. It was extremely primitive as regards work, and had evidently been made by hand, and not on a lathe. Also, there had been something engraved on the lid, but it had been taken off with a file. Next job was to get the lid off without doing any damage to it. It was a good deal more than hand tight, and no ordinary methods were any good. I stood it lid downwards for a week in a dish of glycerine as a start, and then made two brass collars, one for the box and one for the lid. At the end of the week I bolted the collars on, fixed the box in the vice and tried tapping the lid round with a hammer—but it wouldn't start. Then, I tried it the other way and it went at once. That explained why no one had ever been able to unscrew it—it had a left-handed thread on it. Rather a dirty trick—especially to go and do it all those years before.

Well, here it was, unscrewing very sweetly, and I began to feel quite like Howard Carter, wondering what I was going to find. It might go off bang, or jump out and hit me in the face. However, nothing exciting happened when the lid came off. In fact, the box only seemed to be half-full of dust, but at the bottom was a curled-up plait of hair. When straightened out, it was about nine inches long and nearly as thick as a pencil. I unplaited a short length, and found it consisted of some hundreds of very fine hairs, but in such a filthy state (I shoved them under the microscope) that there was nothing much to be seen. So I thought I'd clean them. You may as well know the process—first of all a bath of dilute hydrochloric acid to get the grease off, then a solution of washing soda to remove the acid. Then a washing in distilled water, then a bath of alcohol to get rid of any traces of water, and a final rinsing in ether to top off with.

Just as I took it out of the ether they called me down to the telephone, so I shoved it down on the first clean thing which came handy, namely, a piece of white cardboard, and went downstairs. When I examined the plait later on, the

only thing of interest that came to light was the fact that the hairs had all apparently belonged to several different women. The colours ranged from jet-black, through brown, red, and gold, right up to pure white. None of the hair was dyed, which proved how very old it was. I showed it to one or two people, but they didn't seem very enthusiastic, so I put it, and its box, in a little corner cupboard we have, and forgot all about it.

Then the first strange coincidence happened.

About ten days later a pal of mine called Matthews came into the club with a bandage across his forehead. People naturally asked him what was the matter, and he said he didn't know, and what's more the doctor didn't know. He'd suddenly flopped down on his drawing-room floor, in the middle of tea, and lain like a log. His wife was in a fearful stew, of course, and telephoned for the doctor. However, Matthews came round at the end of about five minutes, and sat up and asked what had hit him. When the doctor blew in a few minutes later he was pretty well all right again except for a good deal of pain in his forehead. The doctor couldn't find anything the matter except a red mark which was beginning to show on the skin just where the pain was.

Well, this mark got clearer and clearer, until it looked just like a blow from a stick. Next day it was about the same, except that a big bruise had come up all round the mark. After that it got gradually better. Matthews took the bandage off and showed it me at the club, and there was nothing much more than a bruise with a curved red line down the middle of it, like the track of a red-hot worm.

They'd decided that he'd had an attack of giddiness and must somehow have bumped his head in falling. And that was that.

About a month later, my wife said to me: "We really must tidy your workshop!" And I said: "Must we?" And she said: "Yes, it's a disgrace." So up we went.

Tidying my workshop consists of putting the tools back in their racks, and of my wife wanting to throw away things she finds on the floor, and me saying: "Oh, no, I could use that for so and so."

The first thing we came across was the piece of white cardboard I'd used to put the plait of hair on while I'd run down to the telephone that day.

When we came to look at the other side we found it was a flashlight photograph of a dinner I'd been at. You know what happens. Just before the speeches a lot of blighters come in with a camera and some poles with tin trays on the top, and someone says: "Will the chairman please stand?" and he's helped to his feet. Then there's a blinding flash and the room's full of smoke, and the blighters go out again. Later on a man comes round with proofs, and if you are very weak—or near the chairman—you order one print.

Well, this dinner had been the worshipful company of skate-fasteners or something, and I'd gone as the guest of the same bloke Matthews I've already been telling you about, and we'd sat "side by each," as the saying is. My wife was looking at the photograph, and she said: "What's that mark on Mr. Matthews's forehead?" And I looked—and there, sure enough, was the exact mark that he'd come into the club with a month before. The curious part being, of course, that the photograph had been taken at least six months before he'd had the funny attack which caused the mark. Now, then—on the back of the photograph, when we examined it, was a faint brown line. This was evidently left by the plait of hair when I'd pinned it out to dry, and it had soaked through and caused the mark on Matthews's face. I checked it by shoving a needle right through the cardboard. Of course, this looked like a very strange coincidence, on the face of it. I don't know what your experience of coincidences is—but mine is that they usually aren't. Anyway, I took the trouble to trace out the times, and I finally established, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I had pinned the hair out on the photograph between four and a quarter-past on a particular day, and that Matthews had had his funny attack on the same day at about a quarter-past four. That was something *like* a coincidence. Next, the idea came to me to try it again. Not on poor old Matthews, obviously—he'd already had some—and, besides, he was a friend of mine. I know perfectly well that we are told to be kind to our enemies, and so on—in fact, I do quite a lot of that—but when it comes to trying an experiment of this kind—even if the chances are a million to one against it being a success, I mean having any result—one naturally chooses an enemy rather than a friend. So I looked round for a suitable—victim—someone who wouldn't be missed

much in case there happened to be another coincidence. The individual on whom my choice fell was the nurse next door.

We can see into their garden from our bathroom window—and we'd often noticed the rotten way she treated the child she had charge of when she thought no one was looking. Nothing one could definitely complain about—you know what a thankless job it is to butt into your neighbour's affairs—but she was systematically unkind, and we hated the sight of her. Another thing—when she first came she used to lean over the garden wall and sneak our roses—at least, she didn't even do that—she used to pull them off their stalks and let them drop—I soon stopped that. I fitted up some little arrangements of fish-hooks round some of the most accessible roses and anchored them to the ground with wires. There was Hell-and-Tommy the next morning, and she had her hand done up in bandages for a week.

Altogether she was just the person for my experiment. The first thing was to get a photograph of her, so the next sunny morning, when she was in the garden, I made a noise like an aeroplane out of the bathroom window to make her look up, and got her nicely. As soon as the first print was dry, about eleven o'clock the same night, I fastened the plait of hair across the forehead with two pins—feeling extremely foolish, as one would, of course, doing an idiotic thing like that—and put it away in a drawer in my workshop. The evening of the next day, when I got home, my wife met me and said: "What do you think—the nurse next door was found dead in bed this morning." And she went on to say that the people were quite upset about it, and there was going to be an inquest, and all the rest of it. I tell you, you could have knocked me down with a brick. I said: "No, not really; what did she die of?" You must understand that my lady wife didn't know anything about the experiment. She'd never have let me try it. She's rather superstitious—in spite of living with me. As soon as I could I sneaked up to the workshop drawer and got out the photograph, and—I know you won't believe me, but it doesn't make any difference—when I unpinned the plait of hair and took it off there was a clearly-marked brown stain right across the nurse's forehead. I tell you, that *did* make me sit up, if you like—because that made twice—first Matthews and now—now.

It was rather disturbing, and I know it sounds silly, but I couldn't help feeling to blame in some vague way.

Well, the next thing was the inquest—I attended that, naturally, to know what the poor unfortunate woman had died of. Of course, they brought it in as “death from natural causes,” namely, several burst bloodvessels in the brain; but what puzzled the doctors was what had caused the “natural causes”—also, she had the same sort of mark on her forehead as Matthews had had. They had gone very thoroughly into the theory that she might have been exposed to X-rays—it *did* look a bit like that—but it was more or less proved that she couldn't have been, so they frankly gave it up. Of course, it was all very interesting and entertaining, and I quite enjoyed it, as far as one can enjoy an inquest, but they hadn't cleared up the vexed question—did she fall or was she pu—well, had she snuffed it on account of the plait of hair, or had she not? Obviously, the matter couldn't be allowed to rest there—it was much too thrilling. So I looked about for someone else to try on and decided that a man who lived in the house opposite would do beautifully. He wasn't as bad as the nurse because he wasn't cruel—at least, not intentionally—he played the fiddle—so I decided not to kill him more than I could help.

The photograph was rather a bother, because he didn't go out much. You've no idea how difficult it is to get a decent full-face photograph of a man who knows you by sight without him knowing. However, I managed to get one after a fortnight or so. It was rather small and I had to enlarge it, but it wasn't bad considering. He used to spend most of his evenings up in a top room practising, double stopping and what-not—so after dinner I went up to my workshop window, which overlooks his, and waited for him to begin. Then, when he'd really warmed up to his job, I just touched the plait across the photograph—not hard, but—well, like you do when you are testing a bit of twin flex to find out which wire is which, you touch the ends across an accumulator or an H.T. battery. Quite indefensible in theory, but invariably done in practice. (Personally, I always use the electric light mains—the required information is so instantly forthcoming.) Well, that's how I touched the photograph with the plait. The first time I did it my bloke played a wrong note. That was nothing, of course, so I

did it again more slowly. This time there was no doubt about it. He hastily put down his fiddle and hung out of the window, gasping like a fish for about five minutes. I tell you, I was so surprised that I felt like doing the same.

However, I pulled myself together, and wondered whether one ought to burn the da—er—plait or not. But there seemed too many possibilities in it for that—so I decided to learn how to use it instead. It would take too long to tell you all about my experiments. They lasted for several months, and I reduced the thing to such an exact science that I could do anything from giving a gnat a headache to killing a man. All this, mind you, at the cost of one man, one woman, lots of wood-lice, and a conscientious objector. You must admit that that's pretty moderate, considering what fun one *could* have had with a discovery of that kind.

Well, it seemed to me that, now the control of my absent treatment had been brought to such a degree of accuracy, it would be rather a pity not to employ it in some practical way. In other words, to make a fortune quickly without undue loss of life.

One could, of course, work steadily through the people one disliked, but it wouldn't bring in anything for some time.

I mean, even if you insure them first you've got to wait a year before they die, or the company won't pay, and in any case it begins to look fishy after you've done it a few times. Then I had my great idea: Why shouldn't my process be applied to horse-racing? All one had to do was to pick some outsider in a race—back it for all you were worth at about 100 to 1, and then see that it didn't get beaten.

The actual operation would be quite simple. One would only have to have a piece of card-board with photographs of all the runners stuck on it—except the one that was to win, of course—and then take up a position giving a good view of the race.

I wasn't proposing to hurt any of the horses in the least. They were only going to get the lightest of touches, just enough to give them a tired feeling, soon after the start. Then, if my horse didn't seem to have the race well in hand near the finish, I could give one more light treatment to any horse which still looked dangerous.

It stood to reason that great care would have to be taken not to upset the running too much. For instance, if all the

horses except one fell down, or even stopped and began to graze, there would be a chance of the race being declared void.

So I had two or three rehearsals. They worked perfectly. The last one hardly was a rehearsal because I had a tenner on at 33 to 1, just for luck—and, of course, it came off.

However, it wasn't as lucky as it sounds. Just outside the entrance to the grandstand there was rather a squash and, as I came away I got surrounded by four or five men who seemed to be pushing me about a bit, but it didn't strike me what the game was until one of them got his hand into the breast-pocket of my coat.

Then I naturally made a grab at him and got him just above the elbow with both hands, and drove his hand still further into my pocket. That naturally pushed the pocket, with his hand inside it, under my right arm, and I squeezed it against my ribs for all I was worth.

Now, there was nothing in that pocket but the test tube with the plait of hair in it, and the moment I started squeezing it went with a crunch. I'm a bit lazy about the next minute because my light-fingered friend tried to get free, and two of his pals helped him by bashing me over the head. They were quite rough. In fact, they entered so heartily into the spirit of the thing that they went on doing it until the police came up and collared them.

You should have seen that hand when it did come out of my pocket. Cut to pieces, and bits of broken glass sticking out all over it—like a crimson tipsy cake. He was so bad that we made a call at a doctor's on the way to the police station for him to have a small artery tied up. There was a cut on the back of my head that wanted a bit of attention, too. Quite a nice chap, the doctor, but he was my undoing. He was, without doubt, the baldest doctor I've ever seen, though I once saw a balder alderman.

When he'd painted me with iodine, I retrieved the rest of the broken glass and the hair from the bottom of my pocket and asked him if he could give me an empty bottle to put it in. He said: "Certainly," and produced one, and we corked the hair up in it. When I got home, eventually, I looked in the bottle, but apart from a little muddy substance at the bottom it was empty—the plait of hair had melted away. Then I looked at the label on the bottle, and found the name of a much-advertised hair restorer.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Hear

The Hand

FEAR

AFTER dinner we gathered on deck. The Mediterranean lay without a ripple, its surface shot with the silver radiance of the full moon. The great ship glided along, sending up to the star-strewn sky a snaky column of black smoke. In our wake foamed and whirled a white streak of water, ploughed up by the swift passage of the vessel, churned by the screw, and emitting such brilliant flashes of brightness that it seemed like liquid moonlight, all bubbling and boiling.

Six or seven of us stood there in silent admiration, our eyes turned towards the distant shores of Africa, whither we were bound. The Captain, who had joined us and was smoking a cigar, resumed a conversation begun at the dinner-table.

"Yes, I knew what fear was that day. My ship lay for six hours spiked on a rock with the seas breaking over her. Luckily towards evening we were sighted and picked up by an English collier."

A man who had not yet spoken now broke the silence. He was tall, of tanned complexion and grave aspect, the type of man whom one instinctively assumes to have travelled through vast tracts of unexplored countries amid ever-threatening dangers; whose steady eyes retain in their depths something of the strange lands through which he has wandered, and who is courageous through and through.

"You say, Captain, that you knew what fear was; I don't believe it. You are mistaken both as to the term you used and the sensation you experienced. A brave man has never any fear in the presence of imminent danger. He may be excited, agitated and anxious, but as for fear, that is quite another thing."

The Captain laughed.

"Stuff and nonsense! I tell you I was in a blue funk."

The bronze-faced man replied in deliberate tones :

"Allow me to explain. Fear—and the bravest of men can experience fear—is a dreadful thing ; it is an appalling sensation, as if one's soul were disintegrating ; it is a torturing pang, convulsing mind and heart ; a horror, of which the mere remembrance evokes a shudder of anguish. But a brave man is not subject to it at the prospect of a hostile attack, or confronted with certain death, or any familiar form of danger. It comes upon him in certain abnormal conditions, when certain mysterious influences are at work, in the face of perils which he does not understand. True fear has in it something of the memory of fantastic terrors of long ago. Now a man who believes in ghosts, and thinks he sees a spectre in the night, is bound to experience fear in all its devastating horror.

"About ten years ago I myself had this feeling in broad daylight, and last winter it came upon me again, one December night. Yet I have often run risks and had death hanging over me, and I have seen a lot of fighting. I have been left for dead by brigands. I have been sentenced to be hanged as a rebel in America, and flung into the sea from the deck of a ship off the coast of China. Each time I gave myself up for lost, and accepted the situation without emotion, even without regret.

"But fear is a very different thing. I felt a first hint of it in Africa. And yet the North is its real home ; the sun disperses it like a fog. This is an interesting point. With Orientals, life is of no account ; they are fatalists, one and all. The clear Eastern nights foster none of those sinister forebodings which haunt the minds of those who dwell in cold countries. In the East there is such a thing as panic, but fear is unknown.

"Well, this is what happened to me over there in Africa. I was crossing the vast sandhills south of Ouagla, one of the strangest tracts of country in the world. You all know what the smooth level sands of a sea-beach are like, running on and on interminably. Now picture in your minds the ocean itself turned to sand in the middle of a hurricane. Imagine a tempest without sound and with billows of yellow sand that never move. To the height of mountains they rise, these irregular waves of all shapes and sizes, surging like the ungovernable waters of ocean, but vaster and streaked like watered silk. And the pitiless rays of the devastating southern

sun beat straight down upon that raging sea, lying there without sound or motion. A journey across these steepes of golden dust is one continual ascent and descent, without a moment of respite, or a vestige of shade. The horses pant and sink in up to their knees, and flounder down the slopes of these extraordinary hills.

"Our party consisted of my friend and myself, with an escort of eight spahis, four camels and their drivers. Overcome with heat and fatigue, parched with thirst as the burning desert itself, we rode in silence. Suddenly one of our men uttered a cry; everyone halted; and we remained rooted to the spot, surprised by a phenomenon, which, though familiar to travellers in those God-forsaken parts, has never been explained. From somewhere near at hand, but in a direction difficult to determine, came the roll of a drum, the mysterious drum of the sandhills. Its beating was distinct, now loud, now soft, now dying away, now resuming its weird tattoo.

"The Arabs looked at one another in horror, and one of them said in his own tongue:

"'Death is upon us.'

"And as he spoke, my comrade, my friend, who was almost like a brother to me, fell headlong from his horse, struck down by sunstroke.

"For two hours, while I laboured in vain to save his life, that phantom drum filled my ears with its monotonous, intermittent and baffling throbbing. And I felt fear, real fear, ghastly fear, glide into my bones, as I gazed at the body of the man I loved, there in that sun-baked hollow, between four sandhills, six hundred miles from the nearest French settlement, with that rapid, mysterious drumming echoing in our ears.

"That day I knew what fear was. I realised it even more profoundly on another occasion."

The Captain interrupted him:

"Excuse me, sir, but what was that drum?"

"I don't know," the traveller replied "Nobody knows. Military officers, who have often been startled at this singular sound, are generally of opinion that it is caused by sand scudding before the wind and brushing against tufts of dry grass, the echo being intensified and multiplied to prodigious volume by the valley formation of that desert region. It has been observed that the phenomenon always occurs near small plants burnt up by the sun and as hard as parchment. According

to this theory, the drum was simply a sort of sound mirage, nothing more. But I did not learn this till later.

"I come to my second experience.

"It was last winter in a forest in the north-east of France. The sky was so overcast that night fell two hours before its time. My guide was a peasant, who walked beside me along a narrow path beneath over-arching fir trees, through which the wind howled. Through the tree-tops I saw the clouds scurrying past in wild confusion, as if fleeing in dismay and terror. Now and then, struck by a furious blast, the whole forest groaned as if in pain and swayed in one direction. In spite of my rapid pace and my thick clothes, I was perishing with cold. We were to sup and sleep at the house of a forest-guard, who lived not far away. I had come for some shooting.

"Now and then my guide looked up and muttered :

" ' Miserable weather ! ' "

"Then he talked about the people to whose house we were going. The master of the house had killed a poacher two years before, and ever since he had seemed depressed as if haunted by the memory. His two married sons lived with him. The darkness was intense. I could see nothing before me or around me, and the boughs of the trees, clashing together, filled the night with a ceaseless uproar. At last I saw a light and my companion was soon knocking at a door. Shrill cries of women answered us. Then a man, speaking in a strangled voice, asked :

" ' Who goes there ? ' "

"My guide gave his name and we entered. It was a scene I shall never forget. A white-haired old man with wild eyes, stood waiting for us in the middle of the kitchen with a loaded gun in his hand, while two stout lads, armed with axes, guarded the door. I could make out two women kneeling in the dark corners of the room with their faces hidden against the wall.

"We explained our business. The old man replaced his weapon against the wall, and ordered my room to be made ready. As the women did not stir, he said to me abruptly :

" ' You see, sir, two years ago to-night I killed a man. Last year he appeared and called me. I expect him again this evening. ' "

"And he added in a tone which made me smile :

" ' So we are rather uneasy. ' "

"I did what I could to soothe him and felt glad that I had come that evening, just in the nick of time to witness this exhibition of superstitious terror. I told stories and almost succeeded in calming down the whole family.

"By the fire lay an old dog, asleep with his head on his paws. He was nearly blind, and with his moustached muzzle he was the sort of dog who reminds one of some acquaintance.

"Outside the tempest beat fiercely on the little house, and through a small square opening, a sort of peep-hole near the door, I suddenly saw, by the glare of vivid lightning, a confused mass of trees, tossed about by the wind.

"I realised that, in spite of my efforts, these people were under the sway of some deep-seated terror. Whenever I stopped talking, every ear was straining into the distance. Tired of the spectacle of these foolish fears, I was about to retire to bed when the old forest-guard suddenly jumped up from his chair, seized his gun again and gasped in frenzied tones :

" 'There he is. There he is. I can hear him.'

"The two women fell on their knees again and hid their faces ; the sons picked up their axes. I was preparing to make another attempt to calm them when the sleeping dog suddenly raised his head and stretched his neck and, looking into the fire with his dim eyes, uttered one of those melancholy howls which startle the benighted traveller. All eyes turned towards him. He stood there perfectly rigid, as if he had seen a ghost. And again he howled at something invisible, something unknown, and, to judge from his bristling coat, something that frightened him.

"Livid with terror, the forest-guard cried out :

" 'He scents him. He scents him. He was with me when I killed him.'

"The two distracted women began to mingle their howls with those of the dog. In spite of myself, a cold shudder ran down my spine. The dog's clairvoyance, in that place, at that hour of the night, in the midst of those terror-stricken people, was an uncanny thing to see.

"For a whole hour that dog went on howling without stirring from the spot. He howled as if in the agony of a nightmare, and fear, appalling fear, came upon me. Fear of what ? I have no idea. All I can say is that it was fear.

"We remained there pale and motionless, awaiting some

dreadful sequel, with ears intent and beating hearts, convulsed by the slightest sound. Then the dog began to roam about the room, sniffing the walls, and whining incessantly. The brute was driving us mad. At last the peasant, my guide, seized him in a sort of paroxysm of angry terror and, throwing open a door, flung him out into a small courtyard.

"Immediately the dog was still, and we remained plunged in a silence, which was even more nerve racking. Suddenly we all gave a simultaneous bound. Something was gliding along the outer wall on the side nearest the forest. It brushed against the door and seemed to fumble there with hesitating touch. Then followed two minutes of a silence that maddened us. Then the thing returned, brushing against the wall as before, and scratching on it lightly, like a child scratching with its fingernail. Suddenly a head appeared at the peephole, a white face with gleaming eyes, yes, like those of a wild beast. And from its mouth came a vague sound like a plaintive moan.

"There was a noise of a tremendous explosion in the kitchen. The old forest-guard had fired his gun. At the same time the two sons rushed to block up the peephole with the big table, which they reinforced with the dresser.

"And I solemnly assure you that at that unexpected report of the gun, such an agonising pang shot through me, heart and soul and body, that I was ready to faint, ready to die of fear.

"We stayed there till dawn, unable to stir or utter a word, in the grip of a horror I cannot describe.

"No one ventured to move the barricade till we saw, through a chink in the pent-roof, a slender ray of daylight.

"At the foot of the wall, close against the door, lay the old dog with a bullet in his throat. He had got out of the courtyard by digging a hole under the fence."

The man with the bronzed face ceased speaking. Then he added :

"That night I was in no danger whatever. But I would rather go through again all the worst perils I have encountered than that single moment when the gun was fired at that hairy face at the window."

THE HAND

THE whole party had gathered in a circle round Monsieur Bermutier, the magistrate, who was giving his opinion on the mysterious St. Cloud affair, an inexplicable crime, which had been distracting Paris for a month. No one could make anything of it. Standing with his back to the fireplace, Monsieur Bermutier was discussing it, marshalling his proofs, analysing theories, but arriving at no conclusion. Some of the ladies had risen from their chairs and had come nearer him. Clustering round him, they kept their eyes on the clean-shaven lips which uttered such weighty words. They shuddered and trembled, thrilled by that strange awe, that eager and insatiable craving for horrors, which haunts the mind of women and tortures them like the pangs of hunger. One of them, paler than the others, ventured to break a sudden silence :

"How ghastly ! It has a touch of the supernatural. No one will ever find out the truth about it."

Monsieur Bermutier turned to her :

"That is likely enough. But as for your word, supernatural, it has no place in this affair. We are confronted with a crime, which was ably conceived and very ably executed. It is wrapped in such profound mystery, that we cannot disengage it from the impenetrable circumstances surrounding it. Still, within my own experience, I had once to follow up a case that really appeared to have an element of the supernatural in it. We had eventually to give it up, for lack of means to elucidate it."

Several ladies exclaimed as with one voice :

"Oh, do tell us about it."

With the grave smile appropriate to an investigating magistrate, Monsieur Bermutier resumed :

"At all events pray do not imagine that I myself have for one instant attributed anything of the supernatural to this incident. I believe in normal causes only. It would be much

better if we used the word 'inexplicable' instead of 'supernatural' to express things that we did not understand. In any case, what was striking in the affair I am going to tell you about was not so much the event itself as the circumstances that attended and led up to it. Now to the facts.

"At that time I was investigating magistrate at Ajaccio, a little town of white houses, situated on the edge of a wonderful bay surrounded on all sides by lofty mountains. My principal task there was the investigation of vendettas. Some of these vendettas are sublime, savage, heroic, inconceivably dramatic. In them, one comes across the finest themes of revenge imaginable; hatreds that have endured for centuries, lying for a time in abeyance, but never extinguished; detestable stratagems, assassinations that are mere butchery, others that are almost heroic deeds. For two years I had heard nothing discussed there but the price of blood; nothing but this terrible Corsican tradition, which obliges a man who has been wronged to wreak his revenge upon the man who has wronged him, or upon his descendants or his next-of-kin. Old men, children, distant cousins, I had seen them all slaughtered, and my head was full of tales of vengeance.

"One day I was informed that an Englishman had just taken a lease for several years of a little villa at the far end of the bay. He had brought with him a French manservant, whom he had picked up while passing through Marseilles. It was not long before universal curiosity was excited by this eccentric person, who lived alone and never left his house except to go shooting or fishing. He spoke to no one, never came to the town, and practised for an hour or two every morning with his pistol and carbine. All sorts of legends sprang up about him. He was said to be an exalted personage, who had fled his country for political reasons; to this succeeded a theory that he was in hiding because he had committed a horrible crime of which the most shocking details were given. In my official capacity, I was anxious to learn something about this man, but my inquiries were fruitless. The name he went by was Sir John Rowell. I had to be satisfied with keeping a close watch upon him, but I never really discovered anything suspicious about him. None the less the rumours never ceased, and they became so widespread that I determined to make an effort

to see this stranger with my own eyes. I therefore took to shooting regularly in the neighbourhood of his property.

"My opportunity was long in arriving, but at length it presented itself in the form of a partridge, which I shot under the Englishman's very nose. My dog brought me the bird, but I took it immediately to Sir John Rowell, and begged him to accept it, at the same time making my apologies for my breach of good manners. He was a red-headed, red-bearded man, very tall and massive, a sort of easy-going, well-mannered Hercules. He had none of the so-called British stiffness, and although his accent came from beyond the Channel, he thanked me warmly for my considerate behaviour. Before a month had elapsed we had conversed five or six times. One evening as I was passing his gate, I caught sight of him smoking his pipe. I greeted him and he invited me to come in and have a glass of beer. I accepted his invitation with alacrity. He received me with all the meticulous English courtesy; and although he made shocking mistakes in grammar he was full of the praises of France and Corsica and professed his affection for these countries. Very cautiously, and under the pretext of a lively interest, I began to question him about his life and his plans for the future. His replies were perfectly frank and he told me that he had travelled much in Africa, India and America.

"'Oh, yes, I have had plenty of adventures,' he added, laughing.

"Then I turned the conversation on sport and he gave me the most curious details about shooting hippopotamus, tiger, elephant, and even gorilla.

"'These are all formidable brutes,' I said.

"'Why no,' he said smiling. 'Man is the worst of all.'

"He laughed heartily, like a big, genial Englishman.

"'I have done lots of man-hunting, too.'

"Then he talked about guns and invited me into his house to look at various makes. His drawing-room was hung with black silk, embroidered with golden flowers that shone like fire on the sombre background. It was Japanese work, he said.

"In the middle of the largest panel, a strange object attracted my attention; it stood out clearly against a square of red velvet. I went up to examine it. It was a hand, the hand of a man. Not a clean, white skeleton hand, but a

black, dried-up hand, with yellow nails, bared muscles, and showing old traces of blood, black blood, crusted round the bones, which had been cut clean through as with an axe, about the middle of the forearm. Round the wrist of this unclean object was riveted a powerful chain, which was attached to the wall by a ring strong enough to hold an elephant.

"What is that?" I asked.

"That is my worst enemy," replied the Englishman calmly. "He was an American. His hand was chopped off with a sabre. Then it was skinned with sharp flints, and after that it was dried in the sun for a week. It was a good job for me."

"I touched this human relic. The man must have been a Colossus. The fingers were abnormally long and were attached by enormous tendons to which fragments of skin still adhered. It was a terrible sight, this hand, all flayed; it could not but suggest some savage act of vengeance.

"He must have been a stout fellow," I remarked.

"Oh yes," replied the Englishman in his gentle tones. "He was strong, but I was stronger. I fixed that chain on his hand to keep it from escaping."

"Thinking that he was joking, I replied:

"The chain is hardly needed now; the hand can't run away."

"Sir John answered gravely:

"That hand is always trying to get away. The chain is necessary."

"I cast a rapid, questioning glance at him, wondering whether he was mad or making an unpleasant joke. But his face retained its calm, impenetrable, benevolent expression. I changed the subject and began to admire his guns. I noticed, however, that there were three loaded revolvers lying about on the chairs and tables. Apparently this man lived in constant dread of an attack.

"I went to see him several times, and then my visits ceased. People had become accustomed to his presence and took no further interest in him.

"A whole year passed. One morning towards the end of November my servant woke me with the news that Sir

John Rowell had been murdered during the night. Half an hour later I was in the Englishman's house. With me were the Superintendent of Police and the Captain of gendarmes. Sir John's manservant was weeping at the door of the house; he was distraught and desperate. At first I suspected him. He was, however, innocent. Nor was the murderer ever discovered.

"When I entered the drawing-room, the first thing to strike me was the sight of Sir John's corpse lying flat on its back in the middle of the floor. His waistcoat was torn; one sleeve of his coat was ripped off. There was every indication that a terrible struggle had taken place.

"Death had been caused by strangulation. Sir John's face was black, swollen, and terrifying. It bore an expression of hideous dread. His teeth were clenched on some object. In his neck, which was covered with blood, there were five holes, which might have been made by iron fingers. A doctor arrived. After a prolonged examination of the fingermarks in the flesh, he uttered these strange words :

" ' It almost looks as if he had been strangled by a skeleton. '

"A shudder passed down my spine, and I cast a glance at the wall, at the spot where I had been wont to see that horrible, flayed hand. The hand was no longer there. The chain had been broken and was hanging loose. I bent down close to the corpse and between his clenched teeth I found one of the fingers of that vanished hand. At the second joint it had been cut, or bitten rather, off by the dead man's teeth. An investigation was held, but without result. No door or window had been forced that night, no cupboard or drawer had been broken into. The watchdogs had not been disturbed. The substance of the servant's evidence can be given briefly. For a month past his master had seemed to have something on his mind. He had received many letters, which he had promptly burn. Often he would snatch up a horse-whip and in a passion of rage, which suggested insanity, lash furiously at that withered hand, which had been riveted to the wall, and had mysteriously vanished at the very hour at which the crime was committed.

"Sir John, said the servant, went late to bed and locked himself carefully into his room. He always had firearms within reach. Often during the night he could be heard speaking in loud tones, as if he were wrangling with someone.

On the night in question, however, he had made no sound, and it was only on coming to open the windows the next morning that the servant had discovered the murder. The witness suspected no one.

"I told the magistrates and police officers everything I knew about the deceased, and inquiries were made with scrupulous care throughout the whole island, but nothing was ever discovered.

"Well, one night, three months after the murder, I had a frightful nightmare. I thought I saw that hand, that ghastly hand, running like a scorpion or a spider over my curtains and walls. Thrice I awoke, and thrice fell asleep again, and thrice did I see that hideous relic gallop around my room, with its fingers running along like the legs of an insect. The next day the hand itself was brought to me. It had been found in the cemetery on Sir John's tomb. He had been buried there, as no trace of his family was discoverable. The index finger of the hand was missing. Ladies, that is my story. That is all I know about it."

The ladies were horrified, pale and trembling. One of them protested:

"But the mystery is not solved. There is no explanation. We shall never be able to sleep if you don't tell us what you make of it yourself."

The magistrate smiled a little grimly:

"Well, ladies, I'm afraid I shall deprive you of your nightmares. My theory is the perfectly simple one that the rightful owner of that hand was not dead at all, and that he came looking for his severed member with the one that was left him. But as for explaining how he managed it, that is beyond me. It was a kind of vendetta."

Another lady protested.

"No, that can't be the real explanation."

Still smiling, the narrator rejoined:

"I told you it wouldn't satisfy you."

THOMAS BURKE

The Song of Ho Ling

The Hollow Man

THE SONG OF HO LING

BEHIND the small candle-lit windows of a cottage in Poplar High Street maladroit fingers were plucking from a Chinese guitar a yearning song of two notes, and a metallic voice was singing out of time and out of tune with the guitar. Fingers and voice belonged to young Ho Ling, and the song was a song of Acknowledgment and Avowal. On the first notes of the song the curtains of the window opposite were twitched aside, and between them appeared the head and shoulders of Amber Goldstein. About the head and shoulders swirled an eddy of dense auburn curls, and the bright mouth and fine nose were lit by yet brighter eyes. A girl of spirit and ability.

Nightly this ceremony was performed. Nightly at six o'clock Ho Ling would drag his guitar from its place beneath the bed and carry it to the window; and there he would sit and sing to Amber Goldstein his song of a service rendered and of a holy obligation as yet unfulfilled, but to be fulfilled at whatsoever time he should be called upon by his benefactress the young lady across the road. And nightly the young lady would appear at her window and smile a quick acknowledgment of his declaration of fidelity. And Ho Ling would smile back, worshipping the marvellous, pale, bright beauty of her.

Very pious was Ho Ling in his observance of the teachings of the Four Books. None so devout in worship of his ancestors and in service to his aged father with whom he lived. None so careful a student of the Book of Filial Piety and the I-li and the Li-Chi. From the hands of the white woman across the road he had received a service. He was under a deep obligation to her.

His faith required that that obligation be discharged; now or later, he or some other member of the house of Ho must serve that woman at any time when she stood in need of service. Nothing must come between him and the

performance of that solemn duty. He must wait and watch until occasion arose for the redemption of his assurance.

The favour which she had bestowed upon him was of a somewhat intimate nature ; nothing less than misleading the police in their marshalling of evidence against his old and too gay-hearted father. It was Amber Goldstein who, for some womanly whimsey—possibly some amused concern at the impotent despair of Ho Ling ; possibly some fleeting thought of his forlorn butterfly smile—it was she who smeared her fresh lips with a lie, and proved to the police that old Ho Wong was not a bird, and could not be in two places at once.

Dearer than life to Ho Ling was this aged and roguish father of his. For him he lived and worked and strove, and sometimes stole, following the precepts of the Books ; and a service done to the old man was esteemed by him more highly than a greater service done to himself.

The charge was that old Ho Wong was concerned in the stabbing of Lop-car Langford. The charge was truly laid. Lop-car Langford had pulled the nose of Ho Wong and had knocked over his drink, and the night following Ho Wong had waited in an alley-way for the Lop-car, and had used his knife upon him in a way sufficient to justify a conviction for causing grievous bodily harm.

Two people saw and identified Ho Wong, and the case looked bad for him. In exceeding agitation of mind and body, his dutiful son went about the Quarter, seeking to discover some who had seen his sire at that hour in other places ; but as he had but four or five shillings to his hand, he found none who could say, assuredly, that they had seen him.

It chanced, however, that the two witnesses against Wong had themselves made frequent appearances in the dock, and the magistrate hinted to the police that such witnesses required corroboration. This could not be brought ; wherefore, when Amber Goldstein voluntarily came forward and stated that Ho Wong had spent the whole evening in her shop playing chess the charge was dismissed.

For Amber was a respectable young woman, with a thriving second-hand clothes business. The police had no official knowledge of her, and agreed that her testimony might be considered as unimpeachable.

Upon this young Ho Ling came to Amber with many protestations of gratitude, desiring to know in what manner he might repay her. But Amber made light of it; dismissed it, airily, as a matter of no consequence; as a thing that was done perfunctorily, the outcome of a mood, carrying with it nothing to justify a second thought. She did not say that virtue was its own reward; but she implied that she had done this to please herself, and that there was nothing to make a song about.

But Ho Ling ransacked his poor room, and came across with gifts; a cast-off opium pipe of bamboo, a Chinese banner, two little tasselled devil-chasers, an empty ginger jar and his guitar. But Amber would have nothing. She smiled upon his gifts, and refused them; and when he pressed them upon her, she drove him, in mock exasperation, from her shop, and commanded him never to mention it again.

But he was not so easily quieted. What was to her a trifle, an idle digression, an unrehearsed gesture, was to him a sacrament, a precious gift, something whose value could not be weighed or measured or computed; something that would rest upon him and his family until requited. Had it been a mere casual service, costing her nothing, its effect upon him would have been the same. But it was more: she had made a sacrifice for him; she had told a lie on his behalf. It could not be forgotten.

And, deliberately flouting her statement, that it was nothing to make a song about, he retired to his room and made a song about it; and, as I have told you, sang it to her every evening thereafter.

His honourable papa, however, was not as zealous as himself in observing the precepts of the founder of the ancient line of Ho, and the song made frequent quarrels between them.

Ho Wong's attitude towards these matters was rather that of the white man than the yellow—"I didn't ask her to do it. If it pleases people to go out of their way to help others, let them do it. If they didn't like doing it they wouldn't do it. We didn't ask for it. We have given thanks, and that's enough."

And he rated his son soundly for wasting his evenings by singing to Amber Goldstein, and hanging about her shop during the day, watching for opportunity to serve her. And as young Ho Ling loved his father, he suffered under these

reproaches. Often he tried to make his father acknowledge the solemn obligation under which the house of Ho rested, but his father only made signs with his fingers and spoke the Chinese equivalent of "Rats."

It seems that his father had little respect for the ancient house of Ho: so long as he could eat his rice in tranquility he felt that he could comfortably leave the house of Ho to look after itself. Veneration of family history, usually strong in fathers and weak in sons, was here to be found only in the son.

Ho Wong spoke further, and in harsh terms, of his son's subjection to this white woman, fearing that she was doing him a bit of "no-good," and was making him neglectful of his true business of touting for lodgers for the lodging-houses—on commission—and thereby reducing the slender income and supplies of rice-spirit of himself. It did not need a peevish father to observe that Ho Ling, from gratitude for service rendered, was speedily drifting towards a deeper feeling for the benefactress.

"She is a woman, and she is white, O son with the brains of the peacock. If she looks thus fondly upon you at evenings in response to your song—which, to my untutored ear, is as the grinding of iron wheels upon sandstone—it is because she desires to ensnare you and work her guile upon you. This person, who has seen the passing of many years, might—were he to cast off the restraint of experience—find something not wholly displeasing in her pale-faced beauty. But I am past your age, and am wise—and poor. Think not that I speak against her out of rivalry with you. Were I dowered with your youth and vigour and attainments—and ignorance—and she smiled upon me, I do not say that I would not in some measure imitate the accomplished manœuvres of the duck expiring under a thunderstorm.

"But it is not so. I am of age to be read in the ways of woman. Mysterious and deadly are they all towards men, and most dark and hostile when they are white-skinned. Therefore, O son, take heed. For there is that in the face of the white woman which is not for your good. She will bring sorrow upon you, my son. Ay, and sorrow upon me also. Did you not last week bring home a barely-to-be-looked-upon three shillings for the sustenance of your much-enduring father? Take heed."

Whereto Ho Ling lifted up his voice and cried: "O my

father, nothing holds with me before the desire to serve my august and venerable father. But is it not clear to you that but for this white woman my august father would be languishing in a cold and indescribably dreadful English prison, eating the food of coolies and toiling for white masters? O my father, great debt our house owes to this woman, for she saved us from dishonour and you from misery. I cannot look upon her without thinking of that load of service to be discharged. Surely virtue and beauty must dwell in one who could so venture herself as to render service to us who are nothing to her?"

To which old Ho Wong again spoke the Chinese phrase implying "Rats!"

But a week later the occasion of their quarrel was removed. Opportunity was given to Ho Ling to redeem his vows, and set free the house of Ho from its obligation. He came home on Saturday evening and handed two shillings to his venerable father, as his week's allowance for social dalliance; and when his father demanded more, he replied that his labours had been but ill rewarded that week, and there was no more, save what should keep them in food.

And his father rose and employed terms of no-veneration against his son, accusing him of having wasted time upon the white woman which might better have been used in earning money. He spoke of himself as suffering under emotions of the most disagreeable and hardly-to-be-endured nature, and went angrily.

Left alone, Ho Ling moved for a while about the room; then, having sung his evening song, and waited vainly for acknowledgment from the opposite window, he too went out and mixed himself in the melancholy turmoil of Chinatown's evening. He walked up West India Dock Road, and stopped at the Causeway, and stood looking along its narrow length. In its primrose twilight many figures strolled, stood, shuffled and turned.

He stood in blank indecision for some moments; then, moved by some impulse, he glided into its inviting dusk, and passed through it to Narrow Street. Along this he walked some way until he came to the derelict wharves. Here he stood for some moments snuffing like a dog at the dark perfume of the water-side, and gazing across the river, which threw up a leaden light.

He was turning to the Causeway again when he heard voices. He looked round, and saw nobody; but from behind a pile of rotting barrels fell a cascade of sibilants; and following it a firm, sharp voice: "You leave me alone! Else I'll call the police!"

The voice of Amber Goldstein. Hot upon it followed the thin, shrilly voice of his father, who spoke English so chaotically that even sailors could not understand him. Ho Ling moved forward to get a view of the disputants and discover what was to-do. Here were his two nearest ones quarrelling: he must intervene, and skilfully, without giving offence to either.

As he turned the corner, Amber's voice rose again. "You leave me alone, ye! dirty beast! Else I'll——" And he saw that his father held Amber by the wrist and was pushing her, and that she stood on the edge of the wharf, with her back to the water. A moment's loss of balance and she would be over.

Without thinking, he sprang forward to place himself between them and part them. But, as he did so, Amber, already scared, saw only an antic figure leaping upon her out of the dusk; and, anticipating some fresh peril, tried to step aside to avoid it. Flurried, she missed her footing and slipped. She slithered and kicked for a moment over the edge of the wharf, and grabbed the sleeve of Ho Wong, who had her wrist. He fell to his knees. Then, together, they shot over into the river.

A flood-tide was beating up; and Ho Ling saw his father and his benefactress struggling against the currents. Neither he knew, could swim. A quick glance satisfied him that there was no boat or belt. He knew that with that tide running he could not save both. In that moment, he was faced with a frightful problem. Which must come first—his sacred blood-tie with his father or the equally sacred obligation to the white woman who had served his house?

Through his mind flashed the words of The Book of Filial Piety enjoining utmost sacrifice for the parent's sake; and with them the words of Mencius on the solemnity of discharging services rendered by strangers. His father was at the point of death, and he could save him.

But his benefactress was in like position, and he recalled his song and his solemn vow made before the joss. Here

now was the opportunity to perform that vow and discharge the obligation from the house of Ho. Now or never—for he knew that Amber Goldstein had no family, no blood-relation upon whom he might later discharge it. Now was the time, or for even he must wander with this burden upon him and his house, this unrequited service to lie as a curse upon his children and their children's children.

Yet his father—dare he neglect him even for such a vow as this? After all, his father was a man, a father of a son, and this other was but a woman—a white woman. Too, she herself had made nothing of the service, and had persistently declared that it called for no reward. But there were his vow and his song. Yet the most holy of all ties bound him to his father. What would be said of him by the spirits when it became known that he left his father to die and saved some white woman?

Yet how would he stand when the charge was made that he had left a benefactress to die, with his obligations undischarged, when the power to save her was in his hands? There was the unchangeable law of requital of service and sacrifice; the more stringent in such a case as his, where the service was bestowed by a white. And there was the everlasting law of utmost duty to parents.

For two seconds Ho Ling stood, while he thought of these things. This short, sharp conflict of instincts, battling with each other, lasted no longer. Then, his head whirling with the combating impulses, he dropped his canvas coat, poised on his toes, and leapt to the water. As his head split the water, the icy shock of it cleared him, and he made his decision. With sturdy strokes he swam towards one of the struggling figures.

Which?

THE HOLLOW MAN

HE came up one of the narrow streets which lead from the docks, and turned into a road whose farther end was gay with the light of London. At the end of this road he went deep into the lights of London, and sometimes into its shadows, farther and farther away from the river, and did not pause until he had reached a poor quarter near the centre.

He was a tall, spare figure, wearing a black mackintosh. Below this could be seen brown dungaree trousers. A peaked cap hid most of his face; the little that was exposed was white and sharp. In the autumn mist that filled the lighted streets as well as the dark he seemed a wraith, and some of those who passed him looked again, not sure whether they had indeed seen a living man. One or two of them moved their shoulders, as though shrinking from something.

His legs were long, but he walked with the short, deliberate steps of a blind man, though he was not blind. His eyes were open, and he stared straight ahead; but he seemed to see nothing and hear nothing.

Neither the mournful hooting of sirens across the black water of the river, nor the genial windows of the shops in the big streets near the centre drew his head to right or left. He walked as though he had no destination in mind, yet constantly, at this corner or that, he turned. It seemed that an unseen hand was guiding him to a given point of whose location he was himself ignorant.

He was searching for a friend of fifteen years ago, and the unseen hand, or some dog-instinct, had led him from Africa to London, and was now leading him, along the last mile of his search, to a certain little eating-house. He did not know that he was going to the eating-house of his friend Nameless, but he did know, from the time he left Africa, that he was journeying towards Nameless, and he now knew that he was very near to Nameless.

Nameless didn't know that his old friend was anywhere near *him*, though, had he observed conditions that evening, he might have wondered why he was sitting up an hour later than usual. He was seated in one of the pews of his prosperous little workmen's dining-rooms—a little gold-mine his wife relations called it—and he was smoking and looking at nothing.

He had added up the till and written the copies of the bill of fare for next day, and there was nothing to keep him out of bed after his fifteen hours' attention to business. Had he been asked why he was sitting up later than usual, he would first have answered that he didn't know that he was, and would then have explained, in default of any other explanation, that it was for the purpose of having a last pipe. He was quite unaware that he was sitting up and keeping the door unlatched because a long-jorted friend from Africa was seeking him and slowly approaching him, and needed his services.

He was quite unaware that he had left the door unlatched at that late hour—half-past eleven—to admit pain and woe.

But even as many bells sent dolefully across the night from their steeples their disagreement as to the point of half-past eleven, pain and woe were but two streets away from him. The mackintosh and dungarees and the sharp white face were coming nearer every moment.

There was silence in the house and in the streets; a heavy silence, broken, or sometimes stressed, by the occasional night-noises—motor horns, back-firing of lorries, shunting at a distant terminus. That silence seemed to envelop the house, but he did not notice it. He did not notice the bells, and he did not even notice the lagging step that approached his shop, and passed—and returned—and passed again—and halted. He was aware of nothing save that he was smoking a last pipe, and he was sitting in that state of hazy reverie which he called thinking, deaf and blind to anything not in his immediate neighbourhood.

But when a hand was laid on the latch, and the latch was lifted, he did hear that, and he looked up. And he saw the door open, and got up and went to it. And there, just within the door, he came face to face with the thin figure of pain and woe.

To kill a fellow-creature is a frightful thing. At the time the act is committed the murderer may have sound and convincing reasons (to him) for his act. But time and reflection may bring regret; even remorse; and this may live with him for many years. Examined in wakeful hours of the night or early morning, the reasons for the act may shed their cold logic, and may cease to be reasons and become mere excuses.

And these naked excuses may strip the murderer and show him to himself as he is. They may begin to hunt his soul, and to run into every little corner of his mind and every little nerve, in search of it.

And if to kill a fellow-creature and to suffer the recurrent regret for an act of heated blood is a frightful thing, it is still more frightful to kill a fellow-creature and bury his body deep in an African jungle, and then, fifteen years later, at about midnight, to see the latch of your door lifted by the hand you had stilled and to see the man, looking much as he did fifteen years ago, walk into your home and claim your hospitality.

When the man in mackintosh and dungarees walked into the dining-rooms Nameless stood still; stared; staggered against a table; supported himself by a hand, and said "Oh!"

The other man said "Nameless!"

Then they looked at each other; Nameless with head thrust forward, mouth dropped, eyes wide; the visitor with a dull, glazed expression. If Nameless had not been the man he was—thick, bovine and costive—he would have flung up his arms and screamed. At that moment he felt the need of some such outlet, but did not know how to find it. The only dramatic expression he gave to the situation was to whisper instead of speak.

Twenty emotions came to life in his head and spine, and wrestled there. But they showed themselves only in his staring eyes and his whisper. His first thought, or rather, spasm, was Ghosts-Indigestion-Nervous-Breakdown. His second, when he saw that the figure was substantial and real, was Impersonation. But a slight movement of the part of the visitor dismissed that.

It was a little habitual movement which belonged only to

that man; an unconscious twitching of the third finger of the left hand. He knew then that it was Gopak. Gopak, a little changed, but still, miraculously, thirty-two. Gopak, alive, breathing and real. No ghost. No phantom of the stomach. He was as certain of that as he was that fifteen years ago he had killed Gopak stone-dead and buried him.

The blackness of the moment was lightened by Gopak. In thin, flat tones he asked, "May I sit down? I'm tired." He sat down, and said: "So tired. So tired."

Nameless still held the table. He whispered: "Gopak . . . Gopak . . . But I—I *killed* you. I killed you in the jungle. You were dead. I know you were."

Gopak passed his hand across his face. He seemed about to cry. "I know you did. I know. That's all I can remember—about this earth. You killed me." The voice became thinner and flatter. "And I was so comfortable. So comfortable. It was—such a rest. Such a rest as you don't know. And then they came and—disturbed me. They woke me up. And brought me back." He sat with shoulders sagged, arms drooping, hands hanging between knees. After the first recognition he did not look at Nameless; he looked at the floor.

"Came and disturbed you?" Nameless leaned forward and whispered the words. "Woke you up? Who?"

"The Leopard Men."

"The what?"

"The Leopard Men." The watery voice said it as casually as if it were saying "the night watchman."

"The Leopard Men?" Nameless stared, and his fat face crinkled in an effort to take in the situation of a midnight visitation from a dead man, and the dead man talking nonsense. He felt his blood moving out of its course. He looked at his own hand to see if it was his own hand. He looked at the table to see if it was his table. The hand and the table were facts, and if the dead man was a fact—and he was—his story might be a fact. It seemed anyway as sensible as the dead man's presence. He gave a heavy sigh from the stomach. "A-ah . . . The Leopard Men . . . Yes, I heard about them out there. Tales!"

Gopak slowly wagged his head. "Not tales. They're real. If they weren't real—I wouldn't be here. Would I? I'd be at rest."

Nameless had to admit this. He had heard many tales "out there" about the Leopard Men, and had dismissed them as jungle yarns. But now, it seemed, jungle yarns had become commonplace fact in a little London shop.

The watery voice went on. "They do it. I saw them. I came back in the middle of a circle of them. They killed a nigger to put his life into me. They wanted a white man—for their farm. So they brought me back. You may not believe it. You wouldn't *want* to believe it. You wouldn't want to—see or know anything like them. And I wouldn't want any man to. But it's true. That's how I'm here."

"But I left you absolutely dead. I made every test. It was three days before I buried you. And I buried you deep."

"I know. But that wouldn't make any difference to them. It was a long time after when they came and brought me back. And I'm still dead, you know. It's only my body they brought back." The voice trailed into a thread. "And I'm so tired. So tired. I want to go back—to rest."

Sitting in his prosperous eating-house, Nameless was in the presence of an achieved miracle, but the everyday, solid appointments of the eating-house wouldn't let him fully comprehend it. Foolishly, as he realised when he had spoken, he asked Gopak to explain what had happened. Asked a man who couldn't really be alive to explain how he came to be alive. It was like asking Nothing to explain Everything.

Constantly, as he talked, he felt his grasp on his own mind slipping. The surprise of a sudden visitor at a late hour; the shock of the arrival of a long-dead man; and the realisation that this long-dead man was not a wraith, were too much for him.

During the next half-hour he found himself talking to Gopak as to the Gopak he had known seventeen years ago when they were partners. Then he would be halted by the freezing knowledge that he was talking to a dead man, and that a dead man was faintly answering him. He felt that the thing couldn't really have happened, but in the interchange of talk he kept forgetting the improbable side of it, and accepting it. With each recollection of the truth, his mind would clear and settle in one thought—"I've got to get rid of him. How am I going to get rid of him?"

"But how did you get here?"

"I escaped." The words came slowly and thinly, and out of the body rather than the mouth.

"How?"

"I don't—know. I don't remember anything—except our quarrel. And being at rest."

"But why come all the way here? Why didn't you stay on the coast?"

"I don't—know. But you're the only man I know. The only man I can remember."

"But how did you find me?"

"I don't know. But I had to—find you. You're the only man—who can help me."

"But how can I help you?"

The head turned weakly from side to side. "I don't—know. But nobody else—can."

Nameless stared through the window, looking on to the lamplit street and seeing nothing of it. The everyday being which had been his half an hour ago had been annihilated; the everyday beliefs and disbeliefs shattered and mixed together. But some shred of his old sense and his old standard remained. He must handle this situation. "Well—what you want to do? What you going to do? I don't see how I can help you. And you can't stay here, obviously." A demon of perversity sent a facetious notion into his head—introducing Gopak to his wife—"This is my dead friend."

But on his last spoken remark Gopak made the effort of raising his head and staring with the glazed eyes at Nameless. "But I *must* stay here. There's nowhere else I can stay. I must stay here. That's why I came. You got to help me."

"But you can't stay here. I got no room. All occupied. Nowhere for you to sleep."

The wan voice said: "That doesn't matter. I *don't* sleep."

"Eh?"

"I *don't* sleep. I haven't slept since they brought me back. I can sit here—till you can think of some way of helping me."

"But how *can* I?"

He again forgot the background of the situation, and began to get angry at the vision of a dead man sitting about the place waiting for him to think of something. "How *can* I if you don't tell me how?"

"I don't—know. But you got to. You killed me. And I was dead—and comfortable. As it all came from you—"

killing me—you're responsible for me being—like this. So, you got to—help me. That's why I—came to you."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"I don't—know. I can't—think. But nobody but you can help me. I had to come to you. Something brought me—straight to you. That means that you're the one—that can help me. Now I'm with you, something will—happen to help me. I feel it will. In time you'll—think of something."

Nameless found his legs suddenly weak. He sat down and stared with a sick scowl at the hideous and the incomprehensible. Here was a dead man in his house—a man he had murdered in a moment of black temper—and he knew in his heart that he couldn't turn the man out. For one thing, he would have been afraid to touch him; he couldn't see himself touching him. For another, faced with the miracle of the presence of a fifteen-years-dead man, he doubted whether physical force or any material agency would be effectual in moving the man.

His soul shivered, as all men's souls shiver at the demonstration of forces outside their mental or spiritual horizon. He had murdered this man, and often, in fifteen years, he had repented the act. If the man's appalling story were true, then he had some sort of right to turn to Nameless. Nameless recognised that, and knew that whatever happened he couldn't turn him out. His hot-tempered sin had literally come home to him.

The wan voice broke into his nightmare. "You go to rest, Nameless. I'll sit here. You go to rest." He put his face down to his hands and uttered a little moan. "Oh, why can't I rest? Why can't I go back to my beautiful rest?"

Nameless came down early next morning with a half-hope that Gopak would not be there. But he was there, seated where Nameless had left him last night. Nameless made some tea, and showed him where he might wash. He washed listlessly, and crawled back to his seat, and listlessly drank the tea which Nameless brought to him.

To his wife and the kitchen helpers Nameless mentioned him as an old friend who had had a bit of a shock. "Shipwrecked and knocked on the head. But quite harmless, and

he won't be staying long. He's waiting for admission to a home. A good pal to me in the past, and it's the least I can do to let him stay here a few days. Suffers from sleeplessness and prefers to sit up at night. Quite harmless."

But Gopak stayed more than a few days. He outstayed everybody. Even when the customers had gone Gopak was still there.

On the first morning of his visit when the regular customers came in at mid-day, they looked at the odd, white figure sitting vacantly in the first pew, then stared, then moved away.

All avoided the pew in which he sat. Nameless explained him to them, but his explanation did not seem to relieve the slight tension which settled on the dining-room. The atmosphere was not so brisk and chatty as usual. Even those who had their backs to the stranger seemed to be affected by his presence.

At the end of the first day Nameless, noticing this, told him that he had arranged a nice corner of the front room upstairs, where he could sit by the window and took his arm to take him upstairs. But Gopak feebly shook the hand away, and sat where he was. "No. I don't want to go. I'll stay here. I'll stay here. I don't want to move."

And he wouldn't move. After a few more pleadings Nameless realised with dismay that his refusal was definite; that it would be futile to press him or force him; that he was going to sit in that dining-room for ever. He was as weak as a child and as firm as a rock.

He continued to sit in that first pew, and the customers continued to avoid it, and to give queer glances at it. It seemed that they half-recognised that he was something more than a fellow who had had a shock.

During the second week of his stay three of the regular customers were missing, and more than one of those that remained made acidly facetious suggestions to Nameless that he park his lively friend somewhere else. He made things too exciting for them; all that whoopee took them off their work, and interfered with digestion. Nameless told them he would be staying only a day or so longer, but they found that this was untrue, and at the end of the second week eight of the regulars had found another place.

Each day, when the dinner-hour came, Nameless tried to get him to take a little walk, but always he refused.

He would go out only at night, and then never more than two hundred yards from the shop. For the rest, he sat in his pew, sometimes dozing in the afternoon, at other times staring at the floor. He took his food abstractedly, and never knew whether he had had food or not. He spoke only when questioned, and the burden of his talk was "I'm so tired. So tired."

One thing only seemed to arouse any light of interest in him; one thing only drew his eyes from the floor. That was the seventeen-year-old daughter of his host, who was known as Bubbles, and who helped with the waiting. And Bubbles seemed to be the only member of the shop and its customers who did not shrink from him.

She knew nothing of the truth about him, but she seemed to understand him, and the only response he ever gave to anything was to her childish sympathy. She sat and chatted foolish chatter to him—"bringing him out of himself" she called it—and sometimes he would be brought out to the extent of a watery smile. He came to recognise her step, and would look up before she entered the room. Once or twice in the evening, when the shop was empty, and Nameless was sitting miserably with him, he would ask, without lifting his eyes, "Where's Bubbles." and would be told that Bubbles had gone to the pictures or was out at a dance, and would relapse into deeper vacancy.

Nameless didn't like this. He was already visited by a curse which, in four weeks, had destroyed most of his business. Regular customers had dropped off two by two, and no new customers came to take their place. Strangers who dropped in once for a meal did not come again; they could not keep their eyes or their minds off the forbidding, white-faced figure sitting motionless in the first pew. At mid-day, when the place had been crowded and late-comers had to wait for a seat, it was now two-thirds empty; only a few of the most thick-skinned remained faithful.

And on top of this there was the interest of the dead man in his daughter, an interest which seemed to be having an unpleasant effect. Nameless hadn't noticed it, but his wife had. "Bubbles don't seem as bright and lively as she was. You noticed it lately? She's getting quiet—and a bit slack. Sits about a lot. Paler than she used to be."

"Her age, perhaps."

"No. She's not one of these thin dark sort. No—it's something else. Just the last week or two I've noticed it. Off her food. Sits about doing nothing. No interest. May be nothing; just out of sorts, perhaps . . . How much longer's that horrible friend of yours going to stay?"

The horrible friend stayed some weeks longer—ten weeks in all—while Nameless watched his business drop to nothing and his daughter get pale and peevish. He knew the cause of it. There was no home in all England like his: no home that had a dead man sitting in it for ten weeks. A dead man brought, after a long time, from the grave, to sit and disturb his customers and take the vitality from his daughter. He couldn't tell this to anybody. Nobody would believe such nonsense.

But he *knew* that he was entertaining a dead man, and, knowing that a long-dead man was walking the earth, he could believe in any result of that fact. He could believe almost anything that he would have derided ten weeks ago. His customers had abandoned his shop, not because of the presence of a silent, white-faced man, but because of the presence of a dead-living man.

Their minds might not know it, but their blood knew it. And, as his business had been destroyed, so, he believed, would his daughter be destroyed. Her blood was not warming her; her blood told her only that this was a long-ago friend of her father's, and she was drawn to him.

It was at this point that Nameless, having no work to do, began to drink. And it was well that he did so. For out of the drink came an idea, and with that idea he freed himself from the curse upon him and his house.

The shop now served scarcely half a dozen customers at midday. It had become ill-kempt and dusty, and the service and the food were bad. Nameless took no trouble to be civil to his few customers. Often, when he was notably under drink, he went to the trouble of being very rude to them. They talked about this. They talked about the decline of his business and the dustiness of the shop and the bad food. They talked about his drinking, and, of course, exaggerated it.

And they talked about the queer fellow who sat there day after day and gave everybody the creeps. A few outsiders,

hearing the gossip, came to the dining-rooms to see the queer fellow and the always-tight proprietor; but they did not come again, and there were not enough of the curious to keep the place busy. It went down until it served scarcely two customers a day. And Nameless went down with it into drink.

Then, one evening, out of the drink he fished an inspiration.

He took it downstairs to Gopak, who was sitting in his usual seat, hands hanging, eyes on the floor. "Gopak—listen. You came here because I was the only man who could help you in your trouble. You listening?"

A faint "Yes" was his answer.

"Well, now. You told me I'd got to think of something. I've thought of something. . . . Listen. You say I'm responsible for your condition and got to get you out of it, because I killed you. I did. We had a row. You made me wild. You dared me. And what with that sun and the jungle and the insects, I wasn't meself. I killed you. The moment it was done I could a-cut me right hand off. Because you and me were pals. I could a-cut me right hand off."

"I know. I felt that directly it was over. I knew you were suffering."

"Ah! . . . I have suffered. And I'm suffering now. Well, this is what I've thought. All your present trouble comes from me killing you in that jungle and burying you. An idea came to me. Do you think it would help you—do you think it would put you back to rest if I—if I—if I—killed you again?"

For some seconds Gopak continued to stare at the floor. Then his shoulders moved. Then, while Nameless watched every little response to his idea, the watery voice began. "Yes. Yes. That's it. That's what I was waiting for. That's why I came here. I can see now. That's why I had to get here. Nobody else could kill me. Only you. I've got to be killed again. Yes, I see. But nobody else—would be able—to kill me. Only the man who first killed me. . . . Yes, you've found—what we're both—waiting for. Anybody else could shoot me—stab me—hang me—but they couldn't kill me. Only you. That's why I managed to get here and find you."

The watery voice rose to a thin strength. "That's it. And you must do it. Do it now. You don't want to, I know. But you must. You *must*."

His head drooped and he stared at the floor. Nameless, too, stared at the floor. He was seeing things. He had murdered a man and had escaped all punishment save that of his own mind, which had been terrible enough. But now he was going to murder him again—not in a jungle but in a city; and he saw the slow points of the result.

He saw the arrest. He saw the first hearing. He saw the trial. He saw the cell. He saw the rope. He shuddered.

Then he saw the alternative—the breakdown of his life—a ruined business, poverty, the poorhouse, a daughter robbed of her health and perhaps dying, and always the curse of the dead-living man, who might follow him to the poorhouse. Better to end it all, he thought. Rid himself of the curse which Gopak had brought upon him and his family, and then rid his family of himself with a revolver. Better to follow up his idea.

He got stiffly to his feet. The hour was late evening—half-past ten—and the streets were quiet. He had pulled down the shop-blind and locked the door. The room was lit by one light at the further end. He moved about uncertainly and looked at Gopak. "Er—how would you—how shall I—"

Gopak said, "You did it with a knife. Just under the heart. You must do it that way again."

Nameless stood and looked at him for some seconds. Then, with an air of resolve, he shook himself. He walked quickly to the kitchen.

Three minutes later his wife and daughter heard a crash, as though a table had been overturned. They called but got no answer. When they came down they found him sitting in one of the pews, wiping sweat from his forehead. He was white and shaking, and appeared to be recovering from a faint.

"Whatever's the matter? You all right?"

He waved them away. "Yes, I'm all right. Touch of giddiness. Smoking too much, I think."

"Mmmm. Or drinking. . . . Where's your friend? Out for a walk?"

"No. He's gone off. Said he wouldn't impose any longer, and 'd go and find an infirmary." He spoke weakly and found trouble in picking words. "Didn't you hear that bang—when he shut the door?"

"I thought that was you fell down."

"No. It was him when he went. I couldn't stop him."

"Mmmm. Just as well, I think." She looked about her.

"Things seem to a-gone wrong since he's been here."

There was a general air of dustiness about the place. The table-cloths were dirty, not from use but from disuse. The windows were dim. A long knife, very dusty, was lying on the table under the window. In a corner by the door leading to the kitchen, unseen by her, lay a dusty mackintosh and dungaree, which appeared to have been tossed there. But it was over by the main door, near the first pew, that the dust was thickest—a long trail of it—greyish-white dust.

"Reely this place gets more and more slapdash. Why can't you attend to business? You didn't use to be like this. No wonder it's gone down, letting the place get into this state. Why don't you pull yourself together. Just *look* at that dust by the door. Looks as though somebody's been spilling ashes all over the place."

Nameless looked at it, and his hands shook a little. But he answered, more firmly than before: "Yes, I know. I'll have a proper clean-up to-morrow. I'll put it all to rights to-morrow. I been getting a bit slack."

For the first time in ten weeks he smiled at them; a thin, haggard smile, but a smile.

J. S. FLETCHER

The Lighthouse on Shivering Sand

THE LIGHTHOUSE ON SHIVERING SAND

WHEN Mordecai Chiddock came to join the lighthouse staff on Shivering Sand, Jezreel Cornish was taking his allowance of sleep, and Chiddock, being new to the place, did not know who it was he would meet when Cornish woke up. Otherwise, the boat which had brought him and a month's provisions over from the mainland would never have gone back without him.

Until Chiddock came we had never been more than two at the Shivering Sand. That was a bad arrangement, of course, and it was I who got the worst of it. Once Reuben Cleary fell sick, and had to take to his bed. That was just after the monthly boat had been, and until it came again I had to work night and day and nurse him into the bargain. Then there was Pharaoh Nanjulian; he was a melancholy sort from his youth, and the loneliness and monotony affected his brain. His wits gave out at last, and he used to spend the whole day in singing psalms and hymns, and preaching to the sea-birds. We had great storms that autumn, and the monthly boat came a fortnight late, and found me about done for, what with living day and night with a madman, and doing work for two. And it was because of what I said—not mincing matters—that it was decided to send a third man, so that in such cases as those of Cleary and Nanjulian the other man should not be utterly and badly alone.

Chiddock was the man who was sent. Of course, neither Cornish nor myself knew who would be sent; all we knew was that the September boat would bring a third keeper off with it.

It was a fine, bright morning when he came, and I watched him narrowly as he came on to the platform at the foot of the lighthouse, which you could only make at certain times. He was a thick-set, swarthy man of middle age; he had curling black hair and beard, and his eyes were shiftier than I cared

about. However, he bade me good morning civilly enough, and when he had got his own things up from the boat, gave me a ready hand with the month's stores. It was not till the boat was off again that he seemed disposed for conversation.

"My name's Chiddock," he says. "Mordecai Chiddock."

"Mine's John Graburn," I answered him.

He offered me a plug of tobacco, and took a sort of comprehensive glance all around him.

"This," he says, "is a lonelier place than most of 'em."

"You'll make all the more company," I says. "There'll be three of us now."

He gave a glance at the door at the top of the stone stairway, as if he expected to see the third man appear.

"Ah," he said, "and what sort of shipmate is the other partner?"

"Oh, he's all right," said I, off-hand. "He's only been here this last month, but he's a decent man, is Jezreel."

Chiddock turned round on me like a flash, and I saw a queer look come into his eyes.

"Jezreel!" he said, short and sharp-like. "That's an uncommon name. I knew a man of that name once. This man's other name, what might it be, now, Graburn?"

"Cornish," I answered, "Jezreel Cornish."

Then I knew that something was amiss, for his cheeks lost all their dark colour and turned a strange pasty white, and I saw sweat burst out on them. He came a step nearer and looked at me with burning eyes, and his lips quivered under his black moustache.

"Jezreel Cornish!" he says, almost in a whisper. "Jezreel Cornish! A tallish, scraggy-built man with a long, sharp nose and red hair and ferrety eyes; is it a man like that?"

"And what if it is?" I said, watching him.

He drew a long breath, and, turning, looked out across the bay after the boat from the mainland, as if he would call her back. But she was already a speck in the distance, and he turned again to me, breathing hard.

"If it is," he says, muttering his words, "if it is, mister—well, then, I wish I was in that craft out there, or on shore, or anywhere, that's all. Jezreel Cornish—ah!"

I saw his face suddenly change from white to red, and from red to white, and, turning, there was Cornish himself coming down the stairs, yawning and stretching after his sleep. And

quick as lightning the newcomer's hand went round to his hip-pocket, and I guessed what he had there.

"If that's a pistol you've got," I says, sharp and quick, "you can leave it where it is. I'm boss here, and——"

He seemed to give no more heed to me than if I had been a child, and he kept his eyes on Cornish with the watchfulness of a dog that expects a blow. And I turned then to look at Cornish, wondering what it was that was about to happen.

He was not a quick man at noticing things, Cornish, and he had got to the foot of the stairs before he looked fully at Chiddock. But when he looked, I saw all the colour go out of his face, too, and when it came back it was a sort of dark red, and there was that in his eyes which meant murder. He crouched his body up and together, as an animal does when it's going to spring, and he came forward with his sharp teeth showing under his ragged red moustache; and I knew then that I was going to have a troublous time before the boat came again. For these two, Chiddock and Cornish, stood glaring at each other for all the world like wild beasts that are mad to be at grips, and I could see that it needed but a word to let hell loose between them.

Cornish was the first to speak, and I shouldn't have known his voice; it was so changed and so awful. And it was to me that he spoke, and not to Chiddock.

"Is this the new keeper, Graburn?" says he. "Am I looking at him?"

"You are," I says, "and not any pleasanter than he's looking at you, Jezreel Cornish. And I'm not so blind that I can't see that there's black, cruel, bad blood between you two, and I tell you I'll have none of that sort of thing here; so mind your manners, both of you."

"And he'll be here with us, night and day, shut up with us on Shivering Sand!" says Cornish, watching Chiddock with the eyes of a hungry devil. "Shut up on Shivering Sand, and with me!"

"And with me, and both of you under my orders!" I rapped out sternly. "And I'll see that——"

Cornish spat on the ground at his feet.

"Last time I set eyes on your devil's face, Mordecai Chiddock," he says, in a voice that had suddenly turned as mild as milk, "I told you I'd murder you when the time

came for my chance. It's come! I've got you to myself now, and by God above, I'll kill you!"

What next happened was over in a flash. For Chiddock suddenly whipped the revolver out of his pocket and had Cornish covered. But before he could shoot I knocked it out of his hand, and the next instant had kicked it clean over the edge of the rock into the sea. And with that Chiddock suddenly turned more frightened than before, and it seemed to me that he was going to whimper like a child whose nurse has just checked it.

But Cornish only laughed in a sniggering, sneering fashion, and he turned away from us and went slowly up the stairway into the lighthouse, leaving Chiddock standing there before me with his limbs trembling as if he'd suddenly got the ague, and his damp face whiter than ever. When he spoke his voice was as spiritless as could be, and I saw the man was badly frightened.

"You've left me defenceless, Mr. Graburn," he says, in a queer-sounding voice. "He'll kil. me!"

"There's going to be no killing while I'm about here, my man," I answered; "and you'd best tell me what all this is about. There's a blood feud between you?"

But, instead of answering me directly, he began to talk and murmur to himself, and I could make nothing of what I overheard; and all the time he talked his eyes, as restless as a freshly trapped animal's, were searching the sea all round us, as if he hoped to signal some vessel to come and take him off.

"There's no living soul will come to this rock until the boat comes a month hence, Chiddock," says I. "You can make up your mind to that. So if you want me to help you you'd best to speak, quick."

He turned then, and glowered at me with a sullen rage burning in his eyes.

"If you hadn't treated me as you have," he said, nodding towards the spot where the revolver had gone, "I'd have shot him there and then, and been free of him. As it is, you'll have to stand between us."

"Jezreel Cornish has no firearms," I said. "There's nothing on the rock but an old fowling-piece, and the powder and shot are in my care, and nobody but me can come at them."

Now, this was not strictly true, because I had a revolver of my own carefully hidden away for emergencies; but I was

not going to let anybody know of it. However, Chiddock seemed to think nothing of what I had just said.

"He'll kill me," he repeated, "and it'll be murder on your part if you let him! You'll have to get me away, Mr. Graburn; and till you do, how will I get meat or sleep? I'm hungry and thirsty now."

"It strikes me you're a coward!" says I. "Sit you down while I go up and see what Cornish can tell me about this."

He sat himself down on a rock as obediently as a child might, and I climbed the stair and made into our living-room, where I found Cornish eating and drinking as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened.

"Now then, Cornish," I says, sitting down between him and the door, "what's all this about? I'm headkeeper here, and I'm going to know what you're after."

"What I'm after," he says, coolly, "is killing that man outside, which I shall surely do. There's no hurry. The last time I met him I told him what I should do, and I should have done it then, but he was too cunning, and gave me the slip. That he cannot do this time. He can't swim to the mainland, and he can't fly; he's netted. I can bide my time, but he'll never go off this rock alive!"

"What's he done to you?" I asked him. "As you're so candid about killing him, you might as well be candid about the crime you've got against him."

Before he answered he cut himself a great slab of the corned beef he was eating, and ate heartily of it, just as if he hadn't a trouble in the world.

"That man," he said at last, nodding towards the open door, through which you could see a patch of dancing sea, "that man isn't a man at all; he's a devil! A low, mean, black devil, Mr. Graburn. Him and me was shipmates once, and we were in Valparaiso together, and there we made a nice bit of money—never mind how. I was struck down with a bad fever; the last thing I remembered was trusting him with my money, and his promising to send most of it home to my wife in England. Then the deliriums came on, and I never knew any more until I came to in a charity hospital. The skunk had taken all I had and left me. What's more, he sailed home to England, found my wife, got her to sell up the home and a bit of a little shop she'd got together on pretence of sending the money to me, and persuaded her to trust him

with the sending of it—which, naturally, he never did. And when I did come home, my wife was dead—died in the workhouse, where I found the kids. And, of course, I've got to kill him ! ”

“ If all you say's true, Cornish,” I said, “ he deserves more than that. But I'll have no killing here, understand, now ! ”

“ I don't say that I'll kill him to-day, or to-morrow,” he says, paying no more heed to me than if I hadn't been there. “ Any time'll do me, now that he's trapped. I'll play with him as a cat plays with a mouse. I'll make him as he can't sleep o' nights with fear that death's close on him. I shall enjoy thinking what way I'll kill him ; I'll invent something good ! ”

“ I'm inclined to think trouble and anger have turned your brain, Cornish,” says I.

“ You can think what you're pleased to think,” he says, still as cold in his manner as a jelly-fish, “ but you'll see Mordecai Chiddock's corpse before the boat comes again.”

“ If his living body's turned in to a corpse by you, Jezreel Cornish,” says I, “ you'll only swing for it.”

He laughed at that in his sneering fashion.

The sound of it made me frightened, for I could not bring myself to decide whether the man was in his right mind or gone out of his senses like Pharaoh Nanjulian.

“ You wouldn't have a chance of escape,” I said.

“ Who says I wanted one ? ” he says. “ Since I found my wife dead in the workhouse I've only lived to kill Mordecai Chiddock. And I say you shall see his corpse, Mr. Graburn—and I don't care if you see mine after you've seen his. But I tell you, once for all, I'll kill him ! ”

I left him sitting there, still eating, and went down to the rocks again, to find Chiddock where I had left him. He turned round on me with fright in his eyes.

“ If what I've heard about you is true,” I said, “ you're the lowest-down scoundrel I ever heard of, Chiddock. Death's too good for you, it's too easy. You ought to be skinned alive ! ”

“ I knew that you'd side with him ! ” he growled. “ But it'll be found out, and it'll be murder against the two of you—mind you that, mister.”

“ Leave that to me,” says I, and put down at his side some victuals and drink that I had brought out with me. “ And in the meantime,” I says, “ get that food into you and be more of a man.”

He made no reply to that, but fell upon the victuals like a famished wolf, while I turned back again to the lighthouse. I had a notion in my head, and I was going to put it into shape at once.

There was nothing for it but to keep these two men apart. That Cornish would kill Chiddock I now had no doubt—no more than that Chiddock would have killed Cornish if I had not knocked the revolver out of his hand. Now, that revolver had given me an idea. I, being the only man of the three with a weapon, was certainly master of the situation. And accordingly, as soon as I re-entered the lighthouse, I went to my own chamber, secured and loaded my revolver, and turned into the living-room to speak, with authority, to Jezreel Cornish.

Jezreel had finished his eating, but he still sat at his end of the table, staring moodily at the empty plate. I sat down at the other end; when he at last looked up it was to look straight into the barrel of the revolver.

"What's-- what's the meaning of that?" he growled.

"The meaning, Jezreel, my lad, is that," says I, "I'm master here in more ways than one, but especially because I'm the only man of the three that's got a weapon. Now, you and the man outside are not going to meet. It's your turn for duty; you'll go up that stair, and I shall lock you in. When it's your hour for coming off I'll let you out; but you'll not see him, because he'll be locked up, too, until you're locked in your own chamber. You and him, Cornish, are going to do all the work this next month; I'm going to do nothing but play gaoler and cook until the boat comes and takes one of you off. Now you can just go up to your duty, and I'll draw the bolt on you. Get under way, Cornish!"

"And what if I don't?" he says, looking ugly.

"There's no ifs in this case," says I. "Come!"

He stared hard at me and the revolver for a good minute, then he pushed back his chair and got up.

"I want some tobacco out of the cupboard," he says. "I suppose I can get that?"

"You can get what you like out of the cupboard," I answered him, "so long as you get upstairs thereafter. And remember I've got the drop on you, Cornish."

He mumbled something that I couldn't catch, and going over to the cupboard where we kept our general stores, went

in. He mumbled and grumbled all the time he was in the cupboard, and his face was angry and scowling when he came out. But he marched straight off to the door of the winding stair which led up to the lantern, and in another second I had turned the key on him.

Now, I ought to tell you what this lighthouse was like. Some fifteen miles from the mainland, it stood on a gaunt, bare rock which rose behind a permanent bank in the sea, that had long been known as the Shivering Sand because of the strange motion of the water over it. The entrance was gained by a stone stairway, which led to a double door some twenty feet above the rock; when you passed that door you found yourself in the living-room, which made a half of the circular space of the lighthouse; the other half was divided into four segments, each forming separate chambers. A winding stair went out of the living-room into an upper room, which we used for stores, material, and such-like; where it passed from one to the other was a strong door, the one that I had secured against Cornish's descent.

Above that was a stair of eighty-nine steps to the lamp-room and lantern, from which a revolving light shone out to warn all craft away from us.

So long as I was master I saw no difficulty in keeping Chiddock and Cornish separate. Every door in the place was fitted with good strong locks; on Cornish's I resolved to fit a bolt from a store of hardware which I had by me. Before I released one man from duty I would lock the other in his room; when the released man was safely locked up I would let the other out.

All this being settled, and Cornish safely secured, I went to the door and called to Chiddock, telling him that it would now be safe for him to enter. He came to the foot of the stairway, cringing and fearful; the more I saw of him the more I knew what an arrant coward he was. As things turned out I had to go halfway down the stair and explain what I had done before he would consent to gather his things together and come up.

"Now then, Chiddock," I said, showing him his chamber, "this is your room. You know the arrangement. You came here to do one turn of work in three, as things are you'll do one in two. And keep to what I've arranged, or I'll let Jezreel Cornish loose on you."

"He'll not forgive you for baulking him," he muttered. "Look to yourself, mister. You did me a bad turn in knocking that revolver away. I know Cornish when he's roused."

I made no answer to that, but went about the job of fixing the bolt on the outside of Cornish's door. And with this and other things the afternoon passed quietly, and at the usual time I began to busy myself in making ready for supper.

Mordecai Chiddock sat watching me as if he meant to eat all that I was preparing for the table. For a man in his position and under such fear, he was the hungriest man I ever met, and when we sat down he fell upon the food and the hot coffee as if he had tasted nothing for years.

It gave me no pleasure to sit at meat with a man who had robbed his mate and his mate's wife and children, and I soon got up and left him to finish, after which I served out our usual allowance of rum. I made no answer when he gave me some sort of pledge or toast; instead, I carried my tot into my own chamber and sat down on my bunk to drink it at my leisure. After that I remember lying down for my usual forty winks and feeling more than usually sleepy, and then I remember nothing until I woke to find myself staring at Jezreel Cornish, whose sharp nose and ferrety eyes were very close to my face. It did not take a moment to realise that I was bound about arms and shoulders with a rope that pressed somewhat unpleasantly, and that my revolver was in Cornish's right hand.

"You made a mistake in letting me go to that cupboard, Graburn," he said, sneering at me. "I drugged the coffee and the rum.

"And as for locking me up like a gaolbird, you forgot that a man like me thinks nothing of coming down a hundred-foot rope. I told you I should kill Mordecai Chiddock."

"You've murdered him!" I gasped.

"I'm murdering him," he says, as cool as ever. "He's a-staring at his death in the face. I'm a merciful man, Graburn, I'm giving him time to repent. Come and see him die. And—quick!"

He suddenly menaced me so meaningly with the revolver that I struggled to my feet and let him half-pull, half-thrust me from the room. He forced me across the living-room, and through the double door, and down the stair upon the plateau of rock into the brightest and silverest moonlight I

ever remember—a night so calm and still and beautiful that you'd have wondered any human being could have had anything but good thoughts in his heart between then and sunrise. But Jezreel Cornish was no longer a human being; the devil had taken possession of him.

"Come and see Mordecai Chiddock being a-murdered of, Graburn," he said, chuckling as if it was all a joke. "Come and hear him a-begging and a-praying for mercy—Mordecai what never had no mercy on man nor woman! Come, I tell you!" and he dragged me along as if I had been no more than an infant. "Now look at Mordecai Chiddock, a-facing of his death like the brave sailorman he is!"

From the point to which he dragged me I could see all the devilish ingenuity of what Cornish had done. In the outline of the rock on which Shivering Sand Lighthouse stood there was a crescent-shaped indentation which might have been cut through as you cut into a cheese with a tin scoop. We stood on the edge of one side of this; on the other, dangling from ropes which had been fastened about his waist and under his armpits, the bright moonlight shining full upon him, hung Mordecai Chiddock, a swaying, trembling figure against the silent, pitiless rock behind him.

And he was up to his waist in the advancing tide, and he would soon be submerged and drowned!

I felt myself seized with a sudden fury at the sight of this specimen of Cornish's cruelty, and turned on him with a feeling that would have manifested itself in an attack on him if I had not been bound.

"You devil!" I cried. "You——"

But he raised the revolver, and for a second I thought my time was come.

"Keep a civil tongue, Mr. Graburn," he said, sullenly. "It doesn't much matter to me whether you live or die, but I don't want to murder you. After all, I'm not murdering Chiddock; I'm carrying out justice on him. Nice to hear him, isn't it?"

The wretch swinging in the rising sea not ten yards in front of us had caught sight of me and burst into frantic entreaties for help. But these entreaties were mingled with the most awful curses and blasphemies I had ever heard, and suddenly Cornish began to add a demoniac laughter and jeering to them.

There was nothing but Chiddock's head left above the waves at last. I knew exactly where the water would rise to, and that in another five minutes he would have gone. And Cornish knew that too, and an idea seemed to strike him. He laughed aloud—a devilish laugh that made my blood turn to ice.

“He's only a few minutes left,” he said, “I'll go nearer and whisper a few words of parting to him. It'll be a friendly thing to remind him of what a lot of friends he'll meet presently.”

He made off towards the point where Chiddock was hanging, with the evident intention of calling over the edge into the wretched man's very ears.

As he came near, just as if Providence had it in mind that he should be cheated of seeing his victim die, he tripped over the rope by which Chiddock was secured. He pitched head foremost over the edge of the rock, and I heard his head strike on the ledge beneath, and saw him cleave the oily-faced water like a plummet. And after that neither I nor any man ever saw Jezreel Cornish again.

It was then that I fainted, hearing a long cry of final despair from Chiddock. It may have been unconsciousness rather than fainting—it was long after daybreak when I came round. I crawled to the edge of the rock, and looked into the cove. Chiddock hung limp against the rock, his head dangling on his shoulder.

I could do nothing to help myself; Cornish had made certain in securing me. During the day I contrived to drag myself into shelter against the fierce sunlight, but I almost went mad with hunger and thirst and horror of my situation. That night no light shone out from the Shivering Sand. But its failure saved me, for the darkened lighthouse roused suspicion, and before midnight a fast Government vessel was at the rock to find one dead man hanging over the waves where another was tossing, and a man who was not far from dead, and utterly delirious, babbling incoherently of what he had seen.

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

The Secret of the Schwarztal

THE SECRET OF THE SCHWARZTAL

TWILIGHT was beginning when Christian Summermatter guided me over the ridge and down into the Schwarztal; but there was still light enough to let me see that this Black Valley merited its name.

The slopes shelved so steeply that grass would hardly grow on them. They were strewn with boulders both large and small, brought down by the spring avalanches, and cut by precipices of any height from ten to hundreds of feet. There was no danger, provided that one did not miss the way; but one had to pick the way cautiously from ledge to ledge. Otherwise one might easily find himself "stuck" on the edge of a cliff. There was no sound except the roar of the muddy glacier torrent, far below. The effect, in the gathering darkness, was very eerie.

"A wild place, Christian," I said.

"Very wild, herr. But go carefully," the guide replied.

"There are no lights anywhere. The valley seems quite uninhabited."

"No one lives here because no one can make a living here. The pastures are too bad."

"But the pass at the head of the valley—does no one use it?"

"No honest men use it—only smugglers going to Italy."

"And what a place"—the dark and weird desolation of the spot brought the idea irresistibly to my mind—"what a place for a crime that no one would ever discover!"

"Of course."

It was a curious answer, but it meant only that Christian was too busy looking for the way to talk. We stood on a slope so steep that we needed all the nails in our boots to keep us from slipping, and he peered anxiously to right and left into the deepening gloom.

"Ah, there it is," he said at last. "There is my landmark—the monument."

"The monument? A monument here?"

I repeated the words with as much amazed curiosity as a tired man may feel ; and then following Christian down an easy "chimney" in the rocks, I became aware of a small stone cross placed under the lee of a low cliff at the head of a long grass slope.

"Be careful," Christian warned me. "The slope is easy here, but it gets steeper, and, at the end of it, where you cannot see, there is a precipice which falls sheer into the Schwarzbach. We must keep close under the cliff for a little further, and we must be quick, for it is getting late."

"One minute," I said. "I want to look"; and while Christian walked on, impatient to get to the floor of the valley before it was quite dark, I struck a match, sheltered it in my folded hand, and read the inscription:

"In memory of Robert Densmore. Foully murdered near this spot."

That, with the date, was all ; and as there was no time to speculate, I threw the match away and walked on after Christian.

"So you read the inscription, herr?" he asked when I overtook him.

"Of course. But it tells very little. Do you know the story?"

"Do I know the story? But I thought that everybody knew it. Seeing that I was there——"

"What! You were there when the murder was committed?"

"No, no, herr. There would have been no murder if I had been there—or else I, too, should have been killed. But I was there when the murder was found out. It was the Herr Densmore's brother who found out, and I was with him."

"Ah, then you will tell me——"

"Not now. The way is too difficult for talking in the dark. When we get down to the inn——"

"What inn?"

"The ruin of the inn in which the Herr Densmore slept. The Herr Densmore's brother and I, who was with him, slept there too ; but it has been deserted ever since. Since the herr is tired, and if the herr is not afraid——"

"We will stay there," I said ; and a quarter of an hour's rough going brought us to the abandoned house.

It was a mere shell, one-storeyed, clumsily built of grey stones. All the furniture and all the fixtures had been carried away, no doubt by its patrons the smugglers. All the windows were broken and holes gaped in the roof. Still, one could shelter there on a dry night ; and Christian had soon gathered wood and lighted a fire.

He mulled a bottle of wine to wash down the cold meat and Gruyere cheese in our rucksacks ; and then, as we huddled over the logs and smoked our pipes, he told me, in his artless, childish way, his story of the secret of the Schwarztal.

"It was a great mystery," he said, "and there was much talk about it, even in your English papers. Do you not remember ?"

The vague recollection did recur to me of the mysterious disappearance of an English tourist in the Alps ; but I had missed the sequel, and supposed that the mystery was a mystery still. Christian filled in the details.

"No one knew why he went there," he said. "No one knew that he had gone. It is a mad thing to travel like that, without telling anyone, but some heris like to do it. No one would ever have known about the Herr Densmore if the landlord had not spoken."

"The landlord of this inn ?"

"That is the one ; there was no other. It would have been better for him to be silent, but he talked, and he asked questions when he went down into the village to buy cognac. He told of this herr who slept in his inn and had plenty of money in his pocket and made a mystery of where he was going. He said he was afraid for him because of the smugglers, and he asked if any one had seen him."

"And no one had ?"

"No one."

"There was a search ?"

"Of course ; but nothing could be found. And many smugglers were arrested ; but nothing could be proved. The smugglers, as the herr knows, are generally honest men."

He merely meant that smugglers, on the frontier, stuck, as a rule, to smuggling, fearing to become marked men if they molested tourists ; and that, I knew, was true.

"And so it was a mystery," Christian continued. "They called it the secret of the Schwarztal."

"And the landlord?" I asked. "Did nobody suspect him?"

"How should one suspect the landlord, seeing that it was he who had told? Besides, the landlord said he was a very religious man; and when he heard that the herr could not be found he put up a monument to him. It was a little wooden cross, stuck on a heap of stones, just where the stone cross is standing now. He stuck it up, and he strewed edelweiss on the stones; and everybody said that no doubt the Herr Densmore had tumbled over a precipice or fallen into the Schwarzbach. It might easily happen, they said, that a man might fall into the Schwarzbach and that his body might never be found."

Looking down on the torrent which foamed over the boulders fifty yards below us I could easily believe him. Christian continued:

"And then, three years afterwards, came the Herr Densmore's brother. He was the Captain Densmore; and he had been fighting against the Boers in South Africa, so that he could not come sooner. When he did come people thought, at first, that it was the Herr Densmore himself, for he was his twin brother, and so much like him that even their friends could not always be sure which was which of them. Indeed, the people laughed at first, and said that he had come to look at his own monument; but when they knew, then, of course, they did not laugh any longer."

"But he wanted to look at the monument, I suppose?"

"He wanted to look at it; but he also wanted to search and to inquire, for when they told him that his brother had fallen into the Schwarzbach, he did not believe them. He said he knew better because he had had a dream, and he told me about the dream as I was guiding him up the valley. He was sleeping in his tent, he said, in some place far away in South Africa, and he had dreamt that he saw his brother's body lying dead."

"And it was not the body of a man who had been drowned?"

"No, herr. It was a body with a red gash, as if it had been made with a knife."

"And that was all that he saw?"

"Yes, herr, that was all. He told me that he tried to go to sleep again and dream more, but he could not. He had

that one dream once and it never came back to him again. But it was a very real dream, and it made him feel quite sure that his brother had not fallen into the Schwarzbach. Somebody, he was certain, must have killed his brother, in order to steal his money, and hidden the body away, and he said that he had come to the Schwarztal to find out what had happened.

"But how will you find out, herr?" I asked him. "The Schwarztal is very large. It has been searched already; and a man might search there for years and yet find nothing."

"I know that, Christian," said the Herr Captain. "I shall not look for the body. I shall look for the murderer. It is he who will show me the body."

"But if he is not there?"

"Then I shall wait for him. However far a murderer goes from the place of his crime he always comes back to it."

"But the Herr Captain has never seen him. How, then, will the Herr Captain know him if he comes?"

"He will know me, Christian," said the Herr Captain; and, at first, being a slow man, I wondered what he meant, but afterwards I understood.

"It was because the Herr Captain and his brother were so much alike that the murderer would know him. He would turn pale, thinking that he was a ghost, and then the Herr Captain would understand."

"And I have my revolver, Christian," said the Herr Captain, pulling it out of his pocket and showing it to me.

"And then, Herr Captain?" I asked him.

"Then he will beg for mercy, and he will get none, for I shall shoot him like a dog."

"That was how it was to be; for the Herr Captain, having fought in a war, did not mind shooting a man when he had a good reason for doing so. Only it could not be like that because the first person who turned pale at the sight of the Herr Captain was a woman, and the Herr Captain did not know that women could be wicked, and was not accustomed to shoot them."

"The landlord was out when we got to the inn—he had walked further up the valley with one of the smugglers—and only the landlord's wife was there. She was rather old, and very ugly, without any teeth, and with a shrivelled skin; and when she saw the Herr Captain—for, at first, she had

only seen me—she turned quite white, and looked as if her eyes would fall out of her head.

“‘It is his ghost,’ she screamed. ‘He has come back to haunt us’; and she dropped the wine on to the floor, so that the bottle and the glasses broke, and ran into the kitchen to hide herself.

“‘I thought that the Herr Captain would have followed her, but he did not. He sat down and waited.

“‘The old woman knows,’ he said, ‘and we shall soon know, too. We are on the track of the secret here, and when the landlord comes back——’”

“He fingered his revolver again when he said that, and there was no doubt what he meant. But we knew—for I had asked—that it might be some hours before the landlord came, and there was nothing for us to do in that inn while we were waiting.

“We did not talk, for though I am a slow man, I knew that one must not talk to a man whose mind was full of such terrible thoughts as his. But present /, after a long silence, the Herr Captain himself spoke.

“‘Come, Christian,’ he said. ‘I can’t bear to keep sitting here. You must guide me up the hill to—you know.’”

“He meant that he wanted to be taken to the cross which the landlord had set up for his brother, and so we set out and climbed slowly up the hill—the way that you and I have just come down in the dark.

“‘She won’t run away,’ said the Herr Captain. ‘There’s nowhere for her to run to, so there’s no fear of that. She’ll tell her husband she’s seen a ghost, and he won’t believe her. Presently, when we come down again in the dark——’”

“That was his plan, but there was no need for him to carry it out, as you will see; and he had other thoughts in his mind as well.

“I did not speak to him, except to tell him when to turn to the right or to the left, for it would not have been proper to talk to a man so troubled; and when we reached the cross under the cliff, at the head of the grass slope, I moved away to a little distance, so that the Herr Captain might be alone with his grief.

“He sat down beside the heap of boulders, and I think there were tears in his eyes, although I could not see them. He sat quite a long time like that while the sun went down

behind the mountains; and it was getting dark quickly because, although the moon had risen, it was covered by a cloud. He wept, no doubt, and I think he prayed; and presently, as if it were in answer to his prayers, a new thought came to him.

"'Christian,' he called to me; and when I drew near there was a look on his face such as I had never seen on a man's face before.

"'Christian,' he said, 'suppose the secret is here. I'm going to dig and see.'

"That shocked me, for I am a religious man. Perhaps I am even superstitious. To disturb the cross—it would be desecration. I feared that something terrible would happen.

"But the Herr Captain, he was not afraid. Though he knew that other people believed in ghosts, he, himself, did not believe in them; and it seemed to me that he drove out his fears by thinking.

"'Yes, Christian,' he said to me again, 'I'm going to dig.'

"'But why, herr?' I asked him.

"'Because the man who set up this cross would be sure to believe that this was the last place in which anyone would think of digging.'

"Being a slow man, I had not thought of that; but, of course, it was so.

"'He would think it the safest place of all,' the Herr Captain went on, 'especially if he was a superstitious man. So I shall dig and see what I can find. There is no need for you to help me if you are afraid.'

"'Indeed, I am afraid, herr,' I said, 'but I will stay with you and watch,' and I stood by the Herr Captain while he lifted off the boulders, one by one, and scratched up the earth beneath them. . . .

"And then—how can I tell you? What can I say except that the Herr Captain was right, and that the secret of the Schwarztal was there?

"There was something protruding from the ground—a scrap of the cloth of a man's sleeve. It was enough to show the Herr Captain that he must go on digging. He dug on, and the body was there—or what was left of it—there in that lonely place in which you and I, herr, just now stood together, looking ghastly—oh, so ghastly—in the dark that was now coming on.

"The Herr Captain stood over it like a man dazed and in a dream. It was a long time before he could bring himself to speak, and, of course, it was not for me to speak to him. But at last he spoke, and once more his fingers were on his revolver.

" 'Now the secret is out, Christian,' he said, 'and now I shall know what to do. The man shall first kneel and ask God's pardon for his crime, and then——'

"There could be no doubt whatever what he meant. He meant to force the landlord to confess and then to shoot him; and I verily believe that he would have been ready to shoot me too if I had tried to stop him. But just as he rose to his feet and was about to go down the hill I noticed something.

" 'Wait, herr,' I said. 'I see a light. It is a lantern, and whoever is carrying it is coming towards us.'

"We guessed, of course, that it could be no one but the landlord himself, and it was not hard to guess the reason why he was coming. His wife, of course, had told him of the ghost which she had seen. He did not believe her, but he wanted to make sure. He wanted to stand again by the side of the grave which he had dug, and see for himself that no one had disturbed it. He felt that he could not sleep until he was satisfied of that. So he had taken his lantern and was climbing. That was what both the Herr Captain and I guessed, for, of course, there was no other guess for us to make.

" 'We'll wait for him here,' said the Herr Captain. 'When he comes nearer we'll hide behind one of the big boulders.'

"So we stayed still and watched. Sometimes we lost sight of the lantern as it passed behind one of the rocks; but we soon saw it again, and each time that we saw it it was nearer. We could be quite sure now that it was the landlord, and that he was coming to the grave.

" 'Now it is time to hide, Christian,' said the Herr Captain presently; and we crouched behind one of the boulders as he had said we should.

" 'He mustn't see me,' the Herr Captain went on, 'until it is too late for him to turn back. But if he finds me standing where he expected to find nothing but a mound of stones——'

"That was the plan. The Herr Captain being so like his brother, it was to seem to the landlord as if the man he had killed had risen from the dead to punish him for his crime.

" 'Perhaps,' I said to myself, 'he will even think, as he is such a religious man, that it is the Day of Judgment'; but whether he did think that or not I do not know.

"For things happened just as the Herr Captain had meant, and even better than he had meant.

" 'Stay where you are, Christian,' he said. 'I shall step out alone'; and he stepped out now that the landlord was getting near.

"The cloud that had been hiding the full moon was blown away, and the light of the moon shone upon his face, so that the landlord did, indeed, think that he saw the dead man standing on the very grave in which he had buried him.

"His hands dropped the lantern, and we saw it rolling down the hill until it struck a rock and broke and was put out; and he stood still in an awful silence as if rooted to the ground. It was not until the Herr Captain stepped slowly down towards him, without saying a word, that he found his tongue at last and burst into a shriek.

" 'It is he! It is he! My God!' I heard him yell; and then I saw him turn round and run blindly—right down a steep slope which ended in a precipice; and then I saw the Herr Captain start to run down the same slope, pursuing him.

"It was an awful moment, herr, for I knew of that precipice below, and I knew that it would be impossible for the Herr Captain, just as it was impossible for the landlord, to stop himself. But though I am a slow man when I have to think things out, I am a quick man to act when things go wrong in the mountains; so, quick as lightning I threw my ice axe at the Herr Captain's legs, and tripped him, and, at the same time, I ran forward and fell on him, so that he could not roll any further down the hill; and I was only just in time.

"The Herr Captain, who did not know the ways of mountains as I know them, did not understand at first, and even grappled with me and swore at me; but I tripped him by the arm and pointed.

" 'Look, herr,' I said. 'Look there, and you will see what I have saved you from'; and the Herr Captain looked and saw.

"The full moon shone on the long slope, so that we could see the whole of it; and far away, in front of us, we could see the landlord running—running. The slope was so steep that he could not stop from running, and could not even

throw himself on to the ground. He ran and ran, with bounding strides which got longer and longer as he went, until he reached the black line which stretched at the foot of the slope, and there he disappeared.

“And then, after a pause, I spoke :

“ ‘ You have no need to think any more of vengeance now, Herr Captain,’ I said, ‘ for God has taken the vengeance into His own hands. The murderer has gone over the precipice, and it is a precipice of fifteen hundred feet.’ ”

BASIL TOZER

The Pioneers of Pike's Peak

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THE PIONEERS OF PIKE'S PEAK

IT was a perfect night about the end of June, the sort of night common enough in Colorado at that time of the year. At the end of the game we rose from the card-table and strolled out into the cool, refreshing air. The stars were shining with extraordinary brilliance in a sky so clear that one seemed almost to hear them winking. The moon had not yet risen above the range of mighty peaks which tower into the heavens until their crests gradually vanish into great belts of clouds, and at night seem to touch the lowermost of the celestial bodies ; but a sort of halo, gradually spreading, served to show that presently the moon herself would shed a flood of light from the summit of the highest peaks down into the little village nestling at the feet of the mighty range. No sound broke the perfect stillness. The very houses seemed to sleep.

It was only when my friend and I re-entered the smoky bar saloon, where our companions, grown tired of card playing, were now quietly talking, that we noticed an odd-looking and apparently elderly stranger seated alone beside a little window at the farther end of the room. The window was open, and he was staring through it vacantly, interrupting his reverie only now and again in order to blow a long cloud of smoke into the air. My friend cast a glance of inquiry in his direction.

"He came in about five minutes ago," one of the card-players said.

"Who is he ?"

"Some crank, I suppose. He has not stirred since he sat down there."

"What is he staring at ?" someone asked presently.

"Pike's Peak, apparently," replied Watson, the man who had called the stranger a crank.

Though the words were spoken in an undertone, the

"crank" evidently overheard them, for he turned his head and frowned. Then he resumed his former position—his vigil. Conversation drifted from one topic to another, until the subject of the Rocky Mountains in particular engrossed our attention.

"And who really was the first to reach the top of Pike's Peak?" Watson asked, looking round at us.

"Not Pike himself," answered a man named Norton. "They say that some man—— Look out, you fellows!"

The stranger had left his seat and was approaching us with a slow, stealthy tread, his eyes oddly dilated. We all turned to face him. He was a man of immense proportions, well over six feet in height, and could not have been over fifty years of age, though he looked quite sixty. His hair was white and rather long. He had evidently been handsome in his day, but now the face, neck and hands were disfigured by numberless little sunken blotches not unlike the pits left by smallpox. He wore an old dark suit, a coon cap, thick boots, and leather leggings.

"Who did you say first reached the top of Pike's Peak?" he asked in a threatening, hollow voice. He had dropped into a chair on the opposite side of the table beside me. Norton, whom he had interrupted, came to the rescue.

"I believe that——"

"I was the first to reach it! You don't know the story of our ascent?"

"I know only what I have read and been told," Norton said.

"You yourself have been up Pike's Peak?"

"I have—by the funicular."

"You have seen the summit, then?"

"Yes."

"And what did you see that struck you most—there, fifteen thousand feet above the sea's level?"

Norton had an inspiration.

"Do you mean the stone?" he said.

Instantly the stranger's expression changed. He looked round at us all quite intelligently.

"It *is* there, then?" he inquired eagerly, bending forward across the table.

"Of course it is there," Norton replied. "I can give you the inscription word for word."

"Do! What is it? Tell me, what is it?"

"The inscription says: '*This stone is erected in memory of William Dawkins, James Weston, and Walter Hellier, Pioneers of Pike's Peak, who were devoured by mountain rats while endeavouring to reach this summit.*'"

"Ah!" he ejaculated, greatly relieved. "I am glad it is there—I am glad it is still there. Do you know the story of my friends, the story of those pioneers?"

He had grown suddenly calm. He seemed suddenly to have regained his reason. Our interest and curiosity were now thoroughly aroused. We could see that the stranger was quite sober and though his mind seemed unhinged, he had now a lucid interval.

We noticed that he poured brandy into his tumbler until it was three parts full. Just then the moon shone over the summit of the famous peak, and from where we sat the outline of the glorious mountain could be clearly discerned. Watson drew the stranger's attention to it. An odd, bitter smile flitted across his face. It was the first time we had seen him smile. He sighed once, but did not utter a word. Then his gaze became again riveted on the gigantic peak.

"Pike never would—never could have reached it. He tried several times. Finally he stood upon a hill near the stalactite caves at the base of my mountain, and, pointing with his arm at the summit, said: 'No mortal man will ever tread that peak.'

"But we—*we* were determined to. Our friends shook us by the hands and bade us farewell.

"'But you are fools,' they said, 'You will never come back. You don't know what you may meet in those mountains. You know what Pike said when he came back. You know the tale he told. And some things he would not tell.'

"'Don't go, oh, don't go!' my wife cried in agony.

"I loved her, yet I forced her from me. She was but a unit. In the success of our enterprise lay the welfare of thousands. I told her that to comfort her. It was the last time I saw her alive.

"Early in the morning we started. We took with us arms, food and drink for many days, and the bare necessities of life. We carried everything ourselves. We knew where and how Pike had failed. We would succeed.

"A week later we were fairly in the midst of difficulties.

The work was terribly severe, but we had determination, strength and courage. We had expected to find obstacles, and we were not disappointed. Here enormous boulders which had to be circumvented, there unlooked-for waterfalls and ravines that delayed us, besides vegetation so thick that in places we had to hack our way through it. Then the unknown dangers. There might be snakes concealed among those immense boulders; there might be death-dealing plants such as flourish in South America—indeed, we did not know what there might not be. But we did not pause to consider those things.

“Over a fortnight went by. As we mounted gradually higher and higher our spirits rose as if in sympathy. Far down in the valley we had once or twice during our progress caught glimpses of this very townlet, now called Colorado Springs, also of the village of Manitou. Tiny villages, indeed, they were in those days; and as we saw them from those great heights they looked like little chessboards upon a vast expanse of prairie. And still we fought our way upward.

“How long our expedition had been started I cannot quite remember, when our surroundings gradually changed. In place of rock and black soil we now came upon wide tracks of sandy formation. The undergrowth was still dense, however, though here and there thousands upon thousands of slim fir trees lay rotting upon the ground, evidently swept down by terrific storms, for storms in these mountains sweep down trees as a reaping machine sweeps down standing corn. Sometimes we came upon broad, open spaces, spaces swept clear apparently in early days by giant waterfalls long since dried up. Then, as we penetrated still higher, and the vegetation decreased in density, even the boulders grew smaller. They now looked as though in prehistoric times they had been flung together by a tremendous seismic disturbance.

“‘Have you noticed,’ one of my comrades remarked one day, ‘what a quantity of insects there are here? And the rats are getting more plentiful. We seldom see any of those grey squirrels now.’

“As he spoke he stamped his foot upon an immense brown spider that was running away. Its body burst with a crack, and glutinous liquid spurted out all round his boot. Almost instantly several spiders ran out from beneath a large stone

as if to ascertain what had happened. They stopped. For a moment they seemed for all the world as if they looked at us—looked at us with a malignant, vindictive expression. Then they scuttled away.

"‘I believe I felt several of those spiders scampering over my face last night,’ he continued. ‘You had better be careful; they bite like mischief. These mountains are famous for them, and—just look at that!’

"A couple of large rats were chasing an enormous spider across a long, flat boulder. A moment later spider and rats disappeared over the edge.

"‘They say that mountain rats will devour any living thing,’ Weston said presently. ‘They will eat us if we don’t watch them!’ he added in jest.

"During the early part of the afternoon we had made good progress, when suddenly we came upon a large sloping tract of bare white sand. The sun, still high in the heavens, shone down upon it, and at first sight the sand seemed to be alive with small, moving bodies.

"‘Talk of spiders!’ Dawkins said, laughing. ‘Did you ever see anything like that?’

"We had long ago, in previous expeditions, grown accustomed to surprises. Few things astonished us now. Never in our lives, however, had we seen such an assemblage. There must have been thousands upon thousands of them running about in every direction, colliding with one another and tumbling over one another apparently for no reason. The sight made me think of a gigantic ants’ nest overrun with mammoth ants, and an odd sort of smell that for several days had pervaded the air struck our nostrils with renewed strength.

"Now, as we stepped forward into the open tract, a strange thing happened, for the entire space, which a moment before had been alive, became instantly motionless. The spiders were all there, right under our eyes, but of one accord they had stopped running. Oddly enough, too, every spider was now facing us. Instinctively we felt that we had become objects of intense curiosity. And as we stood there, interested and amused, we could distinctly see the spiders’ great eyes sticking out and evidently watching us. The sight would have given some people ‘the creeps,’ but we rather enjoyed it.

"‘Pish! you hideous things,’ Dawkins said, pitching a

pebble into their midst. In less than a minute hardly a spider was to be seen.

"‘If we describe that sight when we get back we shall be called liars,’ Weston said, glancing at his watch. ‘I’ve seen insects in my time, but never anything like that.’

"The offensive smell was still strong in the air, and as we progressed it increased. Once or twice it became almost unbearable. We had now a long stretch of clear going before us, so we hastened to avail ourselves of it by advancing briskly. And still we saw spiders at every turn, spiders by the thousand sunning themselves on every rock and boulder, great brown spiders with fat, oval bodies, and with thick, hairy legs bent in grotesque curves. I kicked over a stunted little tree that lay rotting—ugh! Quite two or three hundred spiders must have scuttled away from under it.

"‘This is getting beyond a joke,’ Hellier, who seldom spoke, and was generally considered to be rather surly, suddenly said. ‘I tell you what it is: these spiders will go for us.’

"‘Like Weston’s rats!’ Dawkins said, laughing at him, and we were still chaffing Hellier and Weston when Dawkins happened to look round.

"‘Why, Harry!’ he exclaimed.

"There was anxiety in his tone, and I felt his hand grip my shoulder. And no wonder. Though anything but a coward, Dawkins could not help at once realising what we all realised a moment later—that Hellier’s evil omen was more than likely to come true. A sickening feeling of fear had come over him.

"For there, barely fifty yards away, a reddish-brown mass gradually assuming the form of a crescent was steadily, swiftly gliding over the sand, steadily and swiftly overtaking us. And as it approached we could see thousands upon thousands of spiders hastening towards it from every direction and quickly increasing its size. The swarm when we saw it first must have covered between twelve and fifteen square feet. Before it had glided over another twenty yards of sand the entire mass was about one-third as large again. Yet a sort of horrible fascination kept us rooted to the spot where we now stood watching the swarm approach. In order to brace up our courage we told one another that the spiders could not be pursuing us at all; that if we moved aside they

would pass us by. But in our hearts we knew that we tried to think a lie. And when we moved aside in order to convince ourselves the creeping crescent immediately swayed round towards us and seemed if anything to advance more quickly.

"Suddenly the intense horror of the situation flashed across my mind and struck terror into our hearts. For what could we do to avert the terrible fate that threatened us? Savage animals we might have coped with; treacherous human beings, even, we might have bested; but now we were face to face with a peril totally unexpected, utterly loathsome and unassailable.

"Our only chance lies in flight,' Hellier said bitterly.

"Flight! And where shall we fly to? The top of the mountain, I suppose. Look there, Hellier.'

"It was Dawkins who spoke, and he spoke in tones of scorn. Looking around us, we now saw what we had not noticed before. We were surrounded. Everywhere we saw spiders—spiders approaching in brown, gliding crescents of varying sizes. And over a hundred yards away the largest and darkest mass of all could clearly be distinguished, also winding its way along the sand, also approaching, also closing us in. And as this great crescent surged undulatingly, unswervingly across the hillocks and irregularities in the surface of the soil and sand it resembled the great wave of a sluggish, turbid stream leaving a factory sluice.

"Fire into them!' I exclaimed, slipping a couple of shot cartridges into my gun. The two charges cut a lane in the approaching wave, but almost instantly the lane closed up and the undulating mass advanced as if nothing had happened. Together Dawkins and Weston fired four barrels. Rather a broader lane this time, but again it closed up. I had reloaded.

"Give them a volley,' Weston called out; 'that may turn them.'

"We did so, but by the time the smoke had cleared, the swarm had well-nigh resumed its former size and shape. Could we sweep a lane with our eight barrels and then rush through it? No, that was obviously impossible; the width of the wave was too great. And still recruits were pouring in upon every side, and as we fired volley after volley into the quickly approaching swarms in the vain hope of turning them, the distant ravines rang again and again with echoes.

"My God, we are done for!" came despairingly from Hellier, as for the twentieth time he closed his gun with a snap.

"Our barrels had now become almost too hot to hold, and still the hideous, crawling waves, which must have contained trillions of spiders, were fast approaching with a strange swaying motion, and rapidly narrowing our little circle. In a few minutes they would be upon us, overrunning us, dragging us down. Already many stragglers were running up our legs and over our bodies. Now the first swarm was so near that we could distinctly hear it rushing up us, and—ah! the smell, how it still hangs in my nostrils. . . ."

For a moment the stranger stopped. His eyes were widely distended. His limbs trembled. He clutched the table frantically, in order to support himself.

"Suddenly I saw several spiders run up Weston's face and fix upon his eyes. With a scream he dashed them away, but as he did so his eyes began to swell for the brutes had bitten him badly."

He stopped again. He was quivering all over with excitement. Suddenly he dashed from his seat to the farthest corner of the room.

"Keep them from me! Keep them off!" he cried, glaring wildly all round the floor. "Look at them now—look at them—ah! God help me!—help me!—help me! . . ."

He sprang to right and left, then towards the door. Perspiration was pouring down his face. Then suddenly he snatched wildly at imaginary spiders running up his sleeves and legs, running up his body, running over his head, over his face, over his eyes, into his mouth. It was a dreadful sight.

"Stop him!" my friend cried out, jumping from his seat and rushing towards the old man; but as he approached a blindly directed blow from the stranger's fist almost stunned him, and the innkeeper and two rough-looking men entered the room.

"Hold him, boys," the innkeeper said calmly, as the two men pounced upon the stranger and the innkeeper sauntered towards us.

"Poor fellow," he said, "I always have to be ready for him—look at him now, yet the doctors pronounce him sane. He often is sane, of course, but when I heard him starting

on the spiders and saw him drinking brandy I knew what to expect."

"Is there any truth in his spider story?" I asked.

"Any truth? It's all truth—at least, that's my belief. Though I was quite a lad at the time the expedition started, I can remember it well. Four of them there were, all strong and hearty when they set out. Two months later *he* came back."

"Did he alone escape?"

"He alone came back—came back quite done for and disfigured all over with red blotches. Afterwards they turned into pits. Some years later another expedition went up and reached the summit, but they always maintained that rats, not spiders, devoured those poor fellows, so they set a stone with an inscription on it at the top of the mountain—you have seen it, no doubt."

"What do you yourself think they were killed by?"

"I don't think anything. As sure as you are standing there they were devoured by swarms of great spiders, as Mad Harry has told you. I have heard him tell the story often enough, and he always tells the same story. These marks are not rats' bites."

"It's a horrible place, that mountain," he said, looking at its rugged peak so clearly outlined in the moonlight. "Though you can go up it now by the winding funicular, which is eight miles long, you don't know what horrors may exist in other parts of it. Many a man has gone into those mountains, but few have ever returned."

MICHAEL KENT

The Shade of Peterbee

THE SHADE OF PETERBEE

IT was on Thursdays that the children were accustomed to come to me. On Mondays we would go to "Peterbee's," and on Sunday, my faith! we would have a good time then at a theatre. But on this Thursday there was no one except little Chicot, who draws you the quaint pictures in the "Journal de Samedi." We sat at the garret window and watched Paris wake out of daylight.

Alas! When I come to think of the brave companions that walked the Mount of Martyrs only three years ago I could weep! Sindon, the big American, and Vanderloo, whom one called his shadow, Chicot, Destournelle, Papacini, Medina. They have all gone now, left Montmartre, where one starves and rejoices in the air of the high peaks of Art. They have gone into the big world where folk are fat and dull, and it is eternally an affair of ha'pence. Me, I stay here, and a new generation comes to follow the vision, but I make no ha'pence. They call me "my old," the new ones, because I can show them where one can best get the morning coffee, or how they can raise a franc from the gentlemen of the Mount of Piety. But the good times are gone.

In effect, they went with that evening.

We smoked our cigarettes at the window and looked down over all Paris, with its towers grey as ghosts in the river mists. To the right the sun just warmed into crimson, one of those exhibitions that rend the soul of an artist.

"Eh," said Chicot, throwing his cigarette over the sill and watching it blaze down till it crashed like an inverted rocket in a shower of sparks on the paved court far below. "Eh, my boy, we are going to have a dull evening. Let us put on our wedding garments and go down there where one can laugh. It is closing day at the Salon to-morrow. Sindon will work on his picture all night. I was there this afternoon. He has locked himself in."

"Hold!" said I. "Is there but Peterbee? What of Vanderloo?"

Vanderloo one called "the ghost of 'Peterbee' Sindon" because his admiration led him to imitate the elder man in all things. He also was from New York.

"Vanderloo?" said Chicot. "Is he not at Barbizon painting beetroots?"

"Then," said I, "if you will kindly hand me the lamp of Aladdin or the Stone of the Philosophers, by which I may procure a few pieces of five francs, we will go down there and make merry."

"Bif!" replied Chicot, like one who takes a blow on the ribs. "It is mid-winter also in my pocket. Not one ha'pence."

"For myself," said I, "I hold a cheque from Levy for a picture, but these gentlemen at the Folies, or at Maxims, will not change a cheque for an artist of Montmartre. What a sell!"

"No," returned Chicot, getting up. "See how it blues over the river, my old. The good God sets His palette for a brave picture of a day to-morrow." He turned away from the open window and stood peering at a bit of charcoal work I had on an easel. "Hold," he said at last, "I have it. Sir Alston, the English milord, he will change your cheque, Deschanel."

"Chic," said I, "you are, in effect, a holy man. The little angels whisper in your ear. Let us go to the milord, Sir Alston."

Just then there was a step on the stair. "Peterbee!" cried Chicot.

I listened for a moment. "No, my child," said I, "he has passed the first landing."

The School of Père Dubois was on that landing, and the students had hung above the door a great gong for an ornament. Sindon could never pass it by without beating upon it with his stick, "Ran-tan tan! tan! tan!"

"We will see when he comes to the turn of the stairs," said Chicot. "I wish it is Peterbee. One is never dull with that one."

This good Sindon was one of those boys who pick up a heap of customs. It was that perhaps which made him so much a leader. They mark the individual, centring the attention like the point of red in a landscape. He was very

strong, and always happy, like a wind out of the sea, such as one finds along the Breton shore. One says he had fought with the American corps of aviation, and that is easily believed, but I do not know, for he did not talk of it. These Americans are ever good companions, frank and merry. Add to that, that Peterbee was an artist. Name of a little blue bad man! What an artist! But the world knows that now, and I am proud that I was once his friend. As I said, the big chap could never come up my stair without banging the drum of Father Dubois, or without trying to mount the seven steps to my door in one bound. Six he could clear. One would hear his toe catch on the seventh, slip, and he would drop like a boy whom the great Georges had tapped on the chin, "Bif!" One would hear him cry: "Next time, by the great Mike, I will succeed," and one knew it was Peter B. Sindon.

But we listened, and the steps advanced slow and soft as a Swiss in a cathedral when one sings Benediction.

"Perhaps it is Gaspard," said Chicot.

There came a soft pad of fingers on the panels of our door. "Enter!" I cried.

It was Medina.

Chicot turned away to the window, for he did not love this black spider of Spain.

"Hè, Don Quixote, it is not often you make visits," I said. It is necessary to be polite, you understand.

"I was alone," he replied, drumming his fingers upon the table. "I have been alone all day. By blue! May not one come to talk to a fellow-painter?" He walked across to the window and came back to me. "I hate this crawling twilight," he said, with a little shiver.

One would have thought that an evil spirit walked at the elbow of Monsieur Medina. His eyes shone in the dark.

For myself I would not put a match to the beak of gas. The man carried himself too much as one giving orders. I do not love that under my own tiles, you understand.

"Hate it?" questioned Chicot. "There is enough of light in other places. Me, I love to watch the shadows grow and the far lights born."

And then we stayed silent, for, in truth, something had come in with Medina—something sinister and unnatural, not to be seen.

"One usually finds Peterbee here," I said at last, for the sake of saying something. "He finishes his picture for the Salon," I imagine."

"Sindon!" cried Medina. "Sindon! His picture is nothing—a daub." He drew himself up, tall and lean, like a lank black cat. "Me," he said, "I have painted the prize picture of this year. The ten thousand francs, I have painted it."

"It is finished, then?" I asked.

"No," returned Medina, rolling a cigarette. In the half-light his face showed a curious conceited grin. "I have done some very good work to-day—some very good work. I will finish the picture to-night, but now I rest." Suddenly he leaped, snarling, across the room to Chicot's elbow. "God!" he cried. "Why do you hum that?"

It was just the little nursery jig of a tune, "Pierrot," that Chicot was humming in his nose.

"*Ma chand'le est morte
Je n'ai plus de feu,
Ouvrez moi la porte,
Pour l'amour de Dieu.*"

"Why?" asked Chicot, surprised. "May I not sing that? Must everyone sing, 'Tricotrin?'" It was a revue, you understand. All Paris was mad on it. "In effect," he went on soberly, for the Spaniard's sudden fury had startled him, "I suppose the only the reason I hummed 'Pierrot' was because I wondered if Peterbee would by chance arrive to-night. It is his way to cry at the door, 'Open me your door, then, for the love of God.' I fell into it without consideration."

Medina laughed. "Pardon," he said. "I have worked hard. My nerves are like fiddle-strings, perfectly. But,"—he smiled—"I will win the prize—I, Emanuele Silva di Medina—the first prize of the Salon."

"You have Peterbee to reckon with," said I.

In truth, one knew that the business lay between them, for these were the giants among the young men. "Have you seen his picture, Don?"

"Yes," he said. "It is not finished. It will never be—"—there he stopped suddenly and ended lamely, after a pause—"as good as mine."

At the moment Chicot called from the window: "Come," said he. "Regard the heavens, how they flame."

The sun had gone down like a universe flaming. "One has no words for the ultimate. We went over to the window, the Spaniard and I. "*Epatant*," murmured Chicot. "In the country from which I come folk say it is a sign of murder or violent death."

"Fool!" cried Medina angrily. "There are murders every day."

"In the country they say many foolish things," I said.

Suddenly the Spaniard held up his finger. "Hold! Listen!"

Papers were coming up from the Boulevard de Clichy, the evening sheets. One heard the cries draw near, raucous, imperturbable, like the approach of vultures that scent death.

"What is it that they cry? What is it that they cry?" asked the Spaniard, leaning himself over the sill.

Chicot drew him back. "Come," he said, "I would not love to pick you up from the *pavé* down there. Those papers? It is some apache who has knifed a policeman, as I suppose."

We went, all three, back into the room and sat down. Medina rolled another cigarette restlessly. Somehow it seemed as though we were waiting for something—something evil and inevitable. The Spaniard spoke first. "Lend me two sous," he said irritably. "I will go down and get a paper."

Two sous! We laughed.

"The good Deschanel," said Chicot. "He has got a cheque for a picture. It is worth more than two sous, I imagine. Will you take that? But two sous, sir! We are artists of Montmartre. What would you?"

The cries were below us in the street. I went to the window and listened.

"What is it, Deschanel?" cried the Spaniard.

"Hist!" I said, and leant forward listening.

"It is an artist of Montmartre who kills himself," I said, for the cry had just come to me.

"What?" cried Chicot.

The Spaniard nodded and got up, stretching himself. "Deschanel says it is an artist of Montmartre who has taken poison," he replied smiling. "I wonder who that can be?"

Now, I had not said that.

"Some poor devil of a chap," said I, "who grows tired of having his work turned down." Medina walked to the door and back again. The air of lassitude had fallen from him. "Suppose it should be Sindon?" said he.

It is a strange thing that the idea was in my mind, and Chicot has told me since that it was in his also.

"Impossible!" I said. It seemed so absurd to consider as a reality that this splendid Peterbee, brave, cheery, strong as an ox, successful, full of the joy of life and kindness to the unfortunate, could be blotted out like that.

"If——" insisted Medina.

"Then our little world of Montmartre would lose a good friend," said I.

"And you would gain the prize at the Salon," continued Chicot.

The Spaniard laughed sottly. "But it is of a folly the most extreme," he said. "This is some poor devil of a painter of chocolate boxes who has come to poison himself." He hummed a tune lightly, one of his tinkling southern airs.

Somehow the fact that Medina agreed with me stuck in my gorge. "Yes," I said, "in a business of this sort one can always imagine it is the man in another street or another town. One could not think that it would be the man who sat last night where Medina sits now."

The Spaniard got up quickly. "Oh, light the gas!" he said. "I'm sick of this darkness."

Chicot was ever a bit of a philosopher. "The most interesting problem in your hypotheses," he said, as he put a match to the gas, "is what would become of Peterbee's 'ghost'?"

"Peterbee's ghost!" cried Medina. "What the devil——"

"Vanderloo, I should say," Chicot explained.

"Oh," said I, "Vanderloo! He's at Barbizon. He won't be back for a month. Yes, he would be pretty well cut up. The child thinks there's no one in the world like Sindon. See how he copies his manner and dress!"

"Ah, well," said the Spaniard, "I must get back to work." He grinned. "We do seem to have been talking about fearful things. Can't you give me a drink before I go, Deschanel?"

I got out wine and glasses, two tumblers and a long-stemmed glass of ceremony for Medina.

"To the prize-winner at the Salon!" said Chicot.

"With all my heart!" added Medina very grandly, and raised his glass.

Suddenly, from the hollow stair came a thunderous boom. "Ran-tan-tan, tan, tan!"

Peterbee!

It flicked our nerves because of our late morbid talk.

It caught Medina; my faith! One would have thought that he had a catalepsy. The face became grey under the beard, and the lips a purple gash. The light went out behind the eyes. His glass he held rigid, half-way to his mouth, till the cramping fingers snapped the stem, and then blood, mixed with the wine, dripped heavy on the floor.

Chicot looked to the door. "Good luck!" said he. "He'll be up in a minute."

"Up in a minute!" repeated Medina, like one who talks in his sleep. "Up in a minute! No, no; we must stop him!"

Suddenly he fell silent, frozen. For myself, I had seen; but it was the voice that warned Chicot that we were witnesses of some terrible sort of nervous crisis. The Spaniard faced the light. He might have been cast in bronze.

The bent right arm still held the broken glass awry. His face was what one might picture of a soul in hell.

And in the quiet, echoing on the wooden stair, the steps drew slowly nearer.

It would be perhaps ten seconds before they reached the turn. By that time we had realised that for some reason it was an affair of vital interest to Medina to know whether this was Sindon who mounted or not. One could almost trace a feeble fount of reassurance springing in his mind. It was as though, striving for comfort, he said to himself, "This is not Sindon! It cannot be Sindon!"

On the landing the steps paused. For myself, I heard the little backward step as the visitant addressed himself to the leap; then, unmistakably, the jump, the stumble, the muttered exclamation.

"Peterbee!" said Chic, wondering at the Spaniard's terror. "Peterbee, or his ghost!"

Suddenly Medina broke out weeping and rushed to the

door. "Not that!" he cried. "not that! For the love of heaven, keep him out!"

"Don't be a fool," said Chicot. "We must admit old Peterbee." He laughed a little.

But Medina had clasped the door handle with both hands and was pressing against it with all his strength, with more than his strength, in effect, for this Medina was mad with terror. "Sindon," he wailed, "don't come near me. Don't touch me, Sindon! Have mercy! I know I did it. I know I put it in the wine, but I did not make you drink it, Sindon. I will do anything. I will pray for your soul——"

The steps had reached the door, and a voice, in the accent of America, broke into tuneless song:

*"Ouvrez moi ta porte,
Pour l'amour de Dieu."*

It stopped. A hand rattled at the handle.

That was the end for Medina. I left no doubt in his mind that the eternal soul of Sindon, trucked by his jealousy into the cold outer dark, vengeful and malignant, waited at the door. The strength drained out of him. He sank grovelling. Then, with a sudden spurt of energy, he climbed to his own height.

"Stand clear!" he called madly. "Take care!" and, leaving the door unguarded, took a running dive through the open window.

The door flew wide.

"By the great Mike," said a voice that was not Sindon's. "What game do you children play? I have come back. I'm dead sick of Barbizon. Where's Peterbee?"

It was Vanderloo.

.

Figure to yourselves, gentlemen, this Medina, who lay on the *pavé*, and the boy standing smiling in the door.

"We thought you were Peterbee," I said.

"I meant you should," he returned. "If I could be like the old ass in other things as I am in those I'd do credit to Uncle Sam."

Suddenly Chicot woke up. "Don't you see?" he cried. "Remember, 'I put it in the wine,' he said. We must go to Sindon at once. Don't waste breath. If he drinks he dies."

By good fortune the gentlemen of the police had not arrived. There was a crowd, confusion, and no one to direct, so we said nothing and got through.

We had explained to the boy by the time that we had ascended to the studio of Peterbee. A light shone through the window over the door.

We hammered. We rang and clamoured, and then, all in a moment, fell silent. Was it that the body of our friend lay within before his easel?

Then came a voice and a hand at the door. "Hè, you pirates, you Bolsheviks! Can't a poor painter eat his supper in peace?"

It was Sindon. He opened the door. We flocked in.

"Peterbec," cried Chicot, "what is it that you drink?"

"My faith," said Sindon, "nothing. Is that why you prow round here? In truth, the good Medina has filled up my decanter this morning with some special sherry of of his own. Very thoughtful, seeing we are rivals. I go to drink his health in it."

"Wait," said I, and took the decanter.

"You have not eaten or drunk since this morning?" asked Chicot.

"No time, my son," said he.

"Then thank the Saints," I cried. "This Medina trusted that you would sample his sherry at lunch."

Peterbee grew suddenly grave. "Go on," he said.

"He came to us. He seemed well assured that the prize at the Salon would be his, particularly, you understand, after the newspaper boys came crying the suicide of an artist in Montmartre."

"Well?"

"He was about to go when one came up the stair banging the drum of Père Dubois, and singing at my door from the song 'Pierrot.'"

"It was me," said Vanderloo. "I had just come from Barbizon. I expected to find you there."

"What of Medina?" asked Peterbee, frowning.

"By blue!" said Chicot. "He took the quickest road down, that gentleman, through the window." He turned to Sindon. "Have you some wine you can trust, Peterbee? Fill us all a glass. A sedative is very convenient."

They filled up, and Chicot raised his glass.

"I drink," said he, "to the ghost of Peterbee. May he live long, that one, and haunt us often!"

Sindon stretched his hand across to Vanderloo and shook, speaking in his own tongue. "Now," said he, "come and look at the picture."

It was the "David and Jonathan." You know it. All the world knows.

And the face of David was the face of Vanderloo.

F. MARION CRAWFORD

The Screaming Skull

THE SCREAMING SKULL.

I HAVE often heard it scream. No, I am not nervous, I am not imaginative, and I never believed in ghosts, unless that thing is one. Whatever it is, it hates me almost as much as it hated Luke Pratt, and it screams at me.

If I were you, I would never tell ugly stories about ingenious ways of killing people, for you never can tell but that someone at the table may be tired of his or her nearest and dearest. I have always blamed myself for Mrs. Pratt's death, and I suppose I was responsible for it in a way, though heaven knows I never wished her anything but long life and happiness. If I had not told that story she might be alive yet. That is why the thing screams at me, I fancy.

She was a good little woman, with a sweet temper, all things considered, and a nice gentle voice ; but I remember hearing her shriek once when she thought her little boy was killed by a pistol that went off, though everyone was sure that it was not loaded. It was the same scream ; exactly the same, with a sort of rising quaver at the end ; do you know what I mean ? Unmistakable.

The truth is, I had not realised that the doctor and his wife were not on good terms. They used to bicker a bit now and then when I was here, and I often noticed that little Mrs. Pratt got very red and bit her lip hard to keep her temper, while Luke grew pale and said the most offensive things. He was that sort when he was in the nursery, I remember, and afterward at school. He was my cousin, you know ; that is how I came by this house ; after he died, and his boy Charley was killed in South Africa, there were no relations left. Yes, it's a pretty little property, just the sort of thing for an old sailor like me who has taken to gardening.

One always remembers one's mistakes much more vividly than one's cleverest things, doesn't one ? I've often noticed it.

I was dining with the Pratts' one night, when I told them the story that afterwards made so much difference. It was a wet night in November, and the sea was moaning. Hush!—if you don't speak you will hear it now. . . .

Do you hear the tide? Gloomy sound, isn't it? Sometimes, about this time of year—hallo!—there it is! Don't be frightened, man—it won't eat you—it's only a noise, after all! But I'm glad you've heard it, because there are always people who think it's the wind, or my imagination, or something. You won't hear it again to-night, I fancy, for it doesn't often come more than once. Yes—that's right. Put another stick on the fire, and a little more stuff into that weak mixture you're so fond of. Do you remember old Blauklot the carpenter, on that German ship that picked us up when the *Clontarf* went to the bottom? We were hove to in a howling gale one night, as snug as you please, with no land within five hundred miles, and the ship coming up and falling off as regularly as clockwork.—“B ldy te boor bcebles ashore tis night, poys!” old Blauklot sang out, as he went off to his quarters with the sail-maker. I often think of that, now that I'm ashore for good and all.

Yes, it was on a night like this, when I was at home for a spell, waiting to take the *Olympia* out on her first trip—it was on the next voyage that she broke the record, you remember—but that dates it. Ninety-two was the year, early in November.

The weather was dirty, Pratt was out of temper, and the dinner was bad, very bad indeed, which didn't improve matters, and cold, which made it worse. The poor little lady was very unhappy about it, and insisted on making a Welsh rarebit on the table to counteract the raw turnips and the half-boiled mutton. Pratt must have had a hard day. Perhaps he had lost a patient. At all events, he was in a nasty temper.

“My wife is trying to poison me, you see!” he said. “She'll succeed some day.” I saw that she was hurt, and I made believe to laugh, and said that Mrs. Pratt was much too clever to get rid of her husband in such a simple way; and then I began to tell them about Japanese tricks with spun glass and chopped horsehair and the like.

Pratt was a doctor, and knew a lot more than I did about such things, but that only put me on my mettle, and I told

a story about a woman in Ireland who did for three husbands before anyone suspected foul play.

Did you never hear that tale? The fourth husband managed to keep awake and caught her, and she was hanged. How did she do it? She drugged them, and poured melted lead into their ears through a little horn funnel when they were asleep.

. . . No—that's the wind whistling. It's backing up to the southward again. I can tell by the sound. Besides, the other thing doesn't often come more than once in an evening even at this time of year—when it happened. Yes, it was in November. Poor Mrs. Pratt died suddenly in her bed not long after I dined here. I can fix the date, because I got the news in New York by the steamer that followed the *Olympia* when I took her out on her first trip. You had the *Leofric* the same year? Yes, I remember. What a pair of old buffers we are coming to be, you and I. Nearly fifty years since we were apprentices together on the *Clontarf*. Shall you ever forget old Blauklot? "Biddy te boor heebles ashore, poys!" Ha, ha! Take a little more, with all that water. It's the old Hulstkamp I found in the cellar when this house came to me, the same I brought Luke from Amsterdam five-and-twenty years ago. He had never touched a drop of it. Perhaps he's sorry now, poor fellow.

Where did I leave off? I told you that Mrs. Pratt died suddenly—yes. Luke must have been lonely here after she was dead, I should think; I came to see him now and then, and he looked worn and nervous, and told me that his practice was growing too heavy for him, though he wouldn't take an assistant on any account. Years went on, and his son was killed in South Africa, and after that he began to be queer. There was something about him not like other people. I believe he kept his senses in his profession to the end; there was no complaint of his having made bad mistakes in cases, or anything of that sort, but he had a look about him——

Luke was a red-headed man with a pale face when he was young, and he was never stout; in middle age he turned a sandy grey, and after his son died he grew thinner and thinner, till his head looked like a skull with parchment stretched over it very tight, and his eyes had a sort of glare in them that was very disagreeable to look at.

He had an old dog that poor Mrs. Pratt had been fond of, and

that used to follow her everywhere. He was a bull-dog, and the sweetest tempered beast you ever saw, though he had a way of hitching his upper lip behind one of his fangs that frightened strangers a good deal. Sometimes, of an evening, Pratt and Bumble—that was the dog's name—used to sit and look at each other a long time, thinking about old times, I suppose, when Luke's wife used to sit in that chair you've got. That was always her place, and this was the doctor's, where I'm sitting. Bumble used to climb up by the footstool—he was old and fat by that time, and could not jump much, and his teeth were getting shaky. He would look steadily at Luke, and Luke looked steadily at the dog, his face growing more and more like a skull with two little coals for eyes; and after about five minutes or so, though it may have been less, old Bumble would suddenly begin to shake all over, and all on a sudden he would set up an awful howl, as if he had been shot, and tumble out of the easy-chair and trot away, and hide himself under the sideboard, and lie there making odd noises.

Considering Pratt's looks in those last months, the thing is not surprising, you know. I'm not nervous or imaginative, but I can quite believe he might have sent a sensitive woman into hysterics—his head looked so much like a skull in parchment.

At last I came down one day before Christmas, when my ship was in dock and I had three weeks off. Bumble was not about, and I said casually that I supposed the old dog was dead.

"Yes," Pratt answered, and I thought there was something odd in his tone even before he went on after a little pause. "I killed him," he said presently. "I could not stand it any longer."

I asked what it was that Luke could not stand, though I guessed well enough.

"He had a way of sitting in her chair and glaring at me, and then howling." Luke shivered a little. "He didn't suffer at all, poor old Bumble," he went on in a hurry, as if he thought I might imagine he had been cruel. "I put dionine into his drink to make him sleep soundly, and then I chloroformed him gradually, so that he could not have felt suffocated even if he was dreaming. It's been quieter since then."

I wondered what he meant, for the words slipped out as if he could not help saying them. I've understood since. He meant that he did not hear that noise so often after the dog was out of the way. Perhaps he thought at first that it was old Bumble in the yard howling at the moon, though it's not that kind of noise, is it? Besides, I know what it is, if Luke didn't. It's only a noise, after all, and a noise never hurt anybody yet. But he was much more imaginative than I am. No doubt there really is something about this place that I don't understand; but when I don't understand a thing, I call it a phenomenon, and I don't take it for granted that it's going to kill me, as he did. I don't understand everything, by long odds, nor do you, nor does any man who has been to sea. We used to talk of tidal waves, for instance, and we could not account for them; now we account for them by calling them submarine earthquakes, and we branch off into fifty theories, any one of which might make earthquakes quite comprehensible if we only knew what they are. I fell in with one of them once, and the inkstand flew straight up from the table against the ceiling of my cabin. The same thing happened to Captain Lecky—I dare say you've read about it in his "Wrinkles." Very good. If that sort of thing took place ashore, in this room for instance, a nervous person would talk about spirits and levitation and fifty things that mean nothing, instead of just quietly setting it down as a "phenomenon" that has not been explained yet. My view of that voice, you see.

Besides, what is there to prove that Luke killed his wife? I would not even suggest such a thing to anyone but you. After all, there was nothing but the coincidence that poor little Mrs. Prati died suddenly in her bed a few days after I told that story at dinner. She was not the only woman who ever died like that. Luke got the doctor over from the next parish, and they agreed that she had died of something the matter with her heart. Why not? It's common enough.

Of course, there was the ladle. I never told anybody about that, and it made me start when I found it in the cupboard in the bedroom. It was new, too—a little tinned iron ladle that had not been in the fire more than once or twice, and there was some lead in it that had been melted, and stuck to the bottom of the bowl, all grey, with hardened dross on it. But that proves nothing. A country doctor is generally a handy

man, who does everything for himself, and Luke may have had a dozen reasons for melting a little lead in a ladle. He was fond of sea-fishing, for instance, and he may have cast a sinker for a night-line; perhaps it was a weight for the hall clock, or something like that. All the same, when I found it I had a rather queer sensation, because it looked so much like the thing I had described when I told them the story. Do you understand? It affected me unpleasantly, and I threw it away; it's at the bottom of the sea a mile from the Spit, and it will be jolly well rusted beyond recognising if it's ever washed up by the tide.

You see, Luke must have bought it in the village, years ago, for the man sells just such ladles still. I suppose they are used in cooking. In any case, there was no reason why an inquisitive housemaid should find such a thing lying about, with lead in it, and wonder what it was, and perhaps talk to the maid who heard me tell the story at dinner—for that girl married the plumber's son in the village, and may remember the whole thing.

You understand me, don't you? Now that Luke Pratt is dead and gone, and lies buried beside his wife, with an honest man's tombstone at his head, I should not care to stir up anything that could hurt his memory. They are both dead, and their son, too. There was trouble enough about Luke's death, as it was.

How? He was found dead on the beach one morning, and there was a coroner's inquest. There were marks on his throat, but he had not been robbed. The verdict was that he had come to his end "by the hands or teeth of some person or animal unknown," for half the jury thought it might have been a big dog that had thrown him down and gripped his windpipe, though the skin of his throat was not broken. No one knew at what time he had gone out, nor where he had been. He was found lying on his back above high-water mark, and an old cardboard bandbox that had belonged to his wife lay under his hand, open. The lid had fallen off. He seemed to have been carrying home a skull in the box—doctors are fond of collecting such things. It had rolled out and lay near his head, and it was a remarkably fine skull, rather small, beautifully shaped and very white, with perfect teeth. That is to say, the upper jaw was perfect, but there was no lower one at all, when I first saw it.

Yes, I found it here when I came. You see, it was very white and polished, like a thing meant to be kept under a glass case, and the people did not know where it came from, nor what to do with it; so they put it back into the bandbox and set it on the shelf of the cupboard in the best bedroom, and of course they showed it to me when I took possession. I was taken down to the beach, too, to be shown the place where Luke was found, and the old fisherman explained just how he was lying, and the skull beside him. The only point he could not explain was why the skull had rolled up the sloping sand towards Luke's head instead of rolling downhill to his feet. It did not seem odd to me at the time, but I have often thought of it since, for the place is rather steep. I'll take you there to-morrow if you like—I made a sort of cairn of stones there afterward.

When he fell down, or was thrown down—whichever happened—the bandbox struck the sand, and the lid came off, and the thing came out and ought to have rolled down. But it didn't. It was close to his head, almost touching it, and turned with the face toward it. I say it didn't strike me as odd when the man told me; but I could not help thinking about it afterward, again and again, till I saw a picture of it all when I closed my eyes; and then I began to ask myself why the plaguy thing had rolled up instead of down, and why it had stopped near Luke's head, instead of anywhere else, a yard away, for instance.

You naturally want to know what conclusion I reached, don't you? None that at all explained the rolling, at all events. But I got something else into my head, after a time, that made me feel downright uncomfortable.

Oh, I don't mean as to anything supernatural! There may be ghosts, or there may not be. If there are, I'm not inclined to believe that they can hurt living people except by frightening them, and, for my part, I would rather face any shape of a ghost than a fog in the Channel when it's crowded. No. What bothered me was just a foolish idea, that's all, and I cannot tell how it began, nor what made it grow till it turned into a certainty.

I was thinking about Luke and his poor wife one evening over my pipe and a dull book, when it occurred to me that the skull might possibly be hers, and I have never got rid of the thought since. You'll tell me there's no sense in it, no

doubt; that Mrs. Pratt was buried like a Christian and is lying in the churchyard where they put her, and that it's perfectly monstrous to suppose her husband kept her skull in her old bandbox in his bedroom. All the same, in the face of reason, and common sense, and probability, I'm convinced that he did. Doctors do all sorts of queer things that would make men like you and me feel creepy, and those are just the things that don't seem probable, nor logical, nor sensible to us.

Then, don't you see?—if it really was her skull, poor woman, the only way of accounting for his having it is that, he really killed her, and did it in that way, as the woman killed her husbands in the story, and that he was afraid there might be an examination some day which would betray him. You see, I told that too, and I believe it had really happened some fifty or sixty years ago. They dug up the three skulls, you know, and there was a small lump of lead rattling about in each one. That was what hanged the woman. Luke remembered that, I'm sure. I don't want to know what he did when he thought of it; my taste never ran in the direction of horrors, and I don't fancy you care for them either, do you? No. If you did you might supply what is wanting to the story.

It must have been rather grim, eh? I wish I did not see the whole thing so distinctly, just as everything must have happened. He took it the night before she was buried, I'm sure, after the coffin had been shut, and when the servant girl was asleep. I would bet anything, that when he'd got it, he put something under the sheet in its place, to fill up and look like it. What do you suppose he put there, under the sheet?

I don't wonder you take me up on what I'm saying! First I tell you that I don't want to know what happened, and that I hate to think about horrors, and then I describe the whole thing to you as if I had seen it. I'm quite sure that it was her work-bag that he put there. I remember the bag very well, for she always used it of an evening; it was made of brown plush, and when it was stuffed full it was about the size of—you understand. Yes, there I am, at it again! You may laugh at me, but you don't live here alone, where it was done, and you didn't tell Luke the story about the melted lead. I'm not nervous, I tell you, but sometimes

I begin to feel that I understand why some people are. I dwell on all this when I'm alone, and I dream of it, and when that thing screams—well, frankly, I don't like the noise any more than you do, though I should be used to it by this time.

I ought not to be nervous. I've sailed in a haunted ship. There was a Man in the Top, and two-thirds of the crew died of the West Coast fever inside of ten days after we anchored; but I was all right, then and afterwards. I have seen some ugly sights, too, just as you have, and all the rest of us. But nothing ever stuck in my head in the way this does.

You see, I've tried to get rid of the thing, but it doesn't like that. It wants to be there in its place, in Mrs. Pratt's bandbox in the cupboard in the best bedroom. It's not happy anywhere else. How do I know that? Because I've tried it. You don't suppose that I've not tried, do you? As long as it's there it only screams now and then, generally at this time of year, but if I put it out of the house it goes on all night, and no servant will stay here twenty-four hours. As it is, I've often been left alone and have been obliged to shift for myself for a fortnight at a time. No one from the village would ever pass a night under the roof now, and as for selling the place, or even letting it, that's out of the question. The old women say that if I stay here I shall come to a bad end myself before long.

I'm not afraid of that. You smile at the mere idea that any one could take such nonsense seriously. Quite right. It's utterly blatant nonsense, I agree with you. Didn't I tell you that it's only a noise after all when you started and looked round as if you expected to see a ghost standing behind your chair?

I may be all wrong about the skull, and I like to think that I am—when I can. It may be just a fine specimen which Luke got somewhere long ago, and what rattles about inside when you shake it may be nothing but a pebble, or a bit of hard clay, or anything. Skulls that have lain long in the ground generally have something inside them that rattles, don't they? No, I've never tried to get it out, whatever it is; I'm afraid it might be lead, don't you see? And if it is, I don't want to know the fact, for I'd much rather not be sure. If it really is lead, I killed her quite as much as if I had done the deed myself. Anybody must see that, I should think. As long as I don't know for certain, I have the

consolation of saying that it's all utterly ridiculous nonsense, that Mrs. Pratt died a natural death and that the beautiful skull belonged to Luke when he was a student in London. But if I were quite sure, I believe I should have to leave the house; indeed I do, most certainly. As it is, I had to give up trying to sleep in the best bedroom where the cupboard is.

You ask me why I don't throw it into the pond—yes, but please don't call it a “confounded bugbear”—it doesn't like being called names.

There! Lord, what a shriek! I told you so! You're quite pale, man. Fill up your pipe and draw your chair nearer to the fire, and take some more drink. Old Hollands never hurt anybody yet. I've seen a Dutchman in Java drink half a jug of Hulstkamp in a morning without turning a hair. I don't take much rum myself, because it doesn't agree with my rheumatism, but you are not rheumatic and it won't damage you. Besides, it's a very damp night outside. The wind is howling again, and it will soon be in the south-west; do you hear how the windows rattle? The tide must have turned too, by the moaning.

We should not have heard the thing again if you had not said that. I'm pretty sure we should not. Oh yes, if you choose to describe it as a coincidence, you are quite welcome, but I would rather that you should not call the thing names again, if you don't mind. It may be that the poor little woman hears, and perhaps it hurts her, don't you know? Ghost? No! You don't call anything a ghost that you can take in your hands and look at in broad daylight, and that rattles when you shake it. Do you now? But it's something that hears and understands; there's no doubt about that.

I tried sleeping in the best bedroom when I first came to the house, just because it was the best and the most comfortable, but I had to give it up. It was their room, and there's the big bed she died in, and the cupboard is in the thickness of the wall, near the head, on the left. That's where it likes to be kept, in its handbox. I only used the room for a fortnight after I came, and then I turned out and took the little room downstairs, next to the surgery, where Luke used to sleep when he expected to be called to a patient during the night.

I was always a good sleeper ashore; eight hours is my dose, eleven to seven when I'm alone, twelve to eight when

I have a friend with me. But I could not sleep after three o'clock in the morning in that room—a quarter past, to be accurate—as a matter of fact, I timed it with my old pocket chronometer, which still keeps good time, and it was always at exactly seventeen minutes past three. I wonder whether that was the hour when she died?

It was not what you have heard. If it had been that I could not have stood it two nights. It was just a start and a moan and hard breathing for a few seconds in the cupboard, and it could never have waked me under ordinary circumstances, I'm sure. I suppose you are like me in that, and we are just like other people who have been to sea. No natural sounds disturb us at all, not all the racket of a square-rigger hove to in a heavy gale, or rolling on her beam ends before the wind. But if a lead pencil gets adrift and rattles in the drawer of your cabin table you are awake in a moment. Just so—you always understand. Very well, the noise in the cupboard was no louder than that, but it waked me instantly.

I said it was like a "start." I know what I mean, but it's hard to explain without seeming to talk nonsense. Of course you cannot exactly "hear" a person "start"; at the most, you might hear the quick drawing of the breath between the parted lips and closed teeth, and the almost imperceptible sound of clothing that moved suddenly though very slightly. It was like that.

You know how one feels what a sailing vessel is going to do, two or three seconds before she does it, when one has the wheel. Riders say the same of a horse, but that's less strange, because the horse is a live animal with feelings of its own, and only poets and landsmen talk about a ship being alive, and all that. But I have always felt somehow that besides being a steaming machine or a sailing machine for carrying weights, a vessel at sea is a sensitive instrument, and a means of communication between nature and man, and most particularly the man at the wheel, if she is steered by hand. She takes her impressions directly from wind and sea, tide and stream, and transmits them to the man's hand just as the wireless telegraph picks up the interrupted currents aloft and turns them out below in the form of a message.

You see what I am driving at; I felt that something started in the cupboard, and I felt it so vividly that I heard it, though there may have been nothing to hear, and the sound

inside: my head waked me suddenly. But I really heard the other noise. It was as if it were muffled inside a box, as far away as if it came through a long-distance telephone; and yet I knew that it was inside the cupboard near the head of my bed. My hair did not bristle and my blood did not run cold that time. I simply resented being waked up by something that had no business to make a noise, any more than a pencil should rattle in the drawer of my cabin table on board ship. For I did not understand; I just supposed that the cupboard had some communication with the outside air, and that the wind had got in and was moaning through it with a sort of very faint screech. I struck a light and looked at my watch, and it was seventeen minutes past three. Then I turned over and went to sleep on my right ear. That's my good one; I'm pretty deaf with the other, for I struck the water with it when I was a lad in diving from the fore-topsail yard. Silly thing to do, it was, but the result is very convenient when I want to go to sleep when there's a noise.

That was the first night, and the same thing happened again and several times afterward, but not regularly, though it was always at the same time, to a second; perhaps I was sometimes sleeping on my good ear, and sometimes not. I overhauled the cupboard and there was no way by which the wind could get in, or anything else, for the door makes a good fit, having been meant to keep out moths. I suppose Mrs. Pratt must have kept her winter things in it, for it still smells of camphor and turpentine.

After about a fortnight I had had enough of the noises. So far I had said to myself that it would be silly to yield to it and take the skull out of the room. Things always look differently by daylight, don't they? But the voice grew louder—I suppose one may call it a voice—and it got inside my deaf ear, too, one night. I realised that when I was wide awake, for my good ear was jammed down on the pillow, and I ought not to have heard a fog horn in that position. But I heard that, and it made me lose my temper, unless it scared me, for sometimes the two are not far apart. I struck a light and got up, and I opened the cupboard, grabbed the handbox and threw it out of the window, as far as I could.

Then my hair stood on end. The thing screamed in the air, like a shell from a twelve-inch gun. It fell on the other side of the road. The night was very dark, and I could not

see it fall, but I know it fell beyond the road. The window is just over the front door, it's fifteen yards to the fence, more or less, and the road is ten yards wide. There's a quickset hedge beyond, along the glebe that belongs to the vicarage.

I did not sleep much more that night. It was not more than half an hour after I had thrown the bandbox out when I heard a shriek outside—like what we've heard to-night, but worse, more despairing, I should call it; and it may have been my imagination, but I could have sworn that the screams came nearer and nearer each time. I lit my pipe, and walked up and down for a bit, and then took a book and sat up reading, but I'll be hanged if I can remember what I read nor even what the book was, for every now and then a shriek came up that would have made a dead man turn in his coffin.

A little before dawn some one knocked at the front door. There was no mistaking that for anything else, and I opened my window and looked down, for I guessed that some one wanted the doctor, supposing that the new man had taken Luke's house. It was rather a relief to hear a human knock after that awful noise.

You cannot see the door from above, owing to the little porch. The knocking came again, and I called out, asking who was there, but nobody answered, though the knock was repeated. I sang out again, and said that the doctor did not live here any longer. There was no answer, but it occurred to me that it might be some old countryman who was stone deaf. So I took my candle and went down to open the door. Upon my word, I was not thinking of the thing yet, and I had almost forgotten the other noises. I went down convinced that I should find somebody outside, on the doorstep, with a message. I set the candle on the hall table, so that the wind should not blow it out when I opened the door. While I was drawing the old-fashioned bolt I heard the knocking again. It was not loud, and it had a queer, hollow sound, now that I was close to it, I remember, but I certainly thought it was made by some person who wanted to get in.

It wasn't. There was nobody there, but as I opened the door inward, standing a little on one side, so as to see out at once, something rolled across the threshold and stopped against my foot.

I drew back as I felt it, for I knew what it was before I looked down. I cannot tell you how I knew, and it seemed unreasonable, for I am still quite sure that I had thrown it across the road. It's a French window, that opens wide, and I got a good swing when I flung it out. Besides, when I went out early in the morning, I found the bandbox beyond the thickset hedge.

You may think it opened when I threw it, and that the skull dropped out; but that's impossible, for nobody could throw an empty cardboard box so far. It's out of the question; you might as well try to fling a ball of paper twenty-five yards, or a blown bird's egg.

To go back, I shut and bolted the hall door, picked the thing up carefully, and put it on the table beside the candle. I did that mechanically, as one instinctively does the right thing in danger without thinking at all—unless one does the opposite. It may seem odd, but I believe my first thought had been that somebody might come and find me there on the threshold while it was resting against my foot, lying a little on its side, and turning one hollow eye up at my face, as if it meant to accuse me. And the light and shadow from the candle played in the hollows of the eyes as it stood on the table, so that they seemed to open and shut at me. Then the candle went out quite unexpectedly, though the door was fastened and there was not the least draught; and I used up at least half a dozen matches before it would burn again.

I sat down rather suddenly, without quite knowing why. Probably I had been badly frightened, and perhaps you will admit there was no great shame in being scared. The thing had come home, and it wanted to go upstairs, back to its cupboard. I sat still and stared at it for a bit, till I began to feel very cold; then I took it and carried it up and set it in its place, and I remember that I spoke to it, and promised that it should have its bandbox again in the morning.

You want to know whether I stayed in the room till daybreak? Yes, but I kept a light burning, and sat up smoking and reading, most likely out of fright; plain, undeniable fear, and you need not call it cowardice either, for that's not the same thing. I could not have stayed alone with that thing in the cupboard; I should have been scared to death, though I'm not more timid than other people.

Confound it all, man, it had crossed the road alone, and had got up the doorstep, and had knocked to be let in.

When the dawn came, I put on my boots and went out to find the bandbox. I had to go a good way round, by the gate near the highroad, and I found the box open and hanging on the other side of the hedge. It had caught on the twigs by the string, and the lid had fallen off and was lying on the ground below it. That shows that it did not open till it was well over; and if it had not opened as soon as it left my hand, what was inside it must have gone beyond the road too.

That's all. I took the box upstairs to the cupboard, and put the skull back and locked it up. When the girl brought me my breakfast she said she was sorry, but that she must go, and she did not care if she lost her month's wages. I looked at her, and her face was a sort of greenish, yellowish white. I pretended to be surprised, and asked what was the matter; but that was of no use, for she just turned on me and wanted to know whether I meant to stay in a haunted house, and how long I expected to live if I did, for though she noticed I was sometimes a little hard of hearing, she did not believe that even I could sleep through those screams again—and if I could, why had I been moving about the house and opening and shutting the front door, between three and four in the morning? There was no answering that since she had heard me, so off she went, and I was left to myself. I went down to the village during the morning and found a woman who was willing to come and do the little work there is and cook my dinner, on condition that she might go home every night. As for me, I moved downstairs that day, and I have never tried to sleep in the best bedroom since. After a little while I got a brace of middle-aged Scotch servants from London, and things were quiet enough for a long time. I began by telling them that the house was in a very exposed position, and that the wind whistled round it a good deal in the autumn and winter, which had given it a bad name in the village, the Cornish people being inclined to superstition and telling ghost stories. The two hard-faced, sandy-haired sisters almost smiled, and they answered with great contempt that they had no great opinion of any Southern bogey whatever, having been in service in two English haunted houses, where they had

never seen so much as the Boy in Gray, whom they reckoned no very particular rarity in Forfarshire.

They stayed with me several months, and while they were in the house we had peace and quiet. One of them is here again now, but she went away with her sister within the year. This one—she was the cook—married the sexton, who works in my garden. That's the way of it. It's a small village and he has not much to do, and he knows enough about flowers to help me nicely, besides doing most of the hard work; for though I'm fond of exercise, I'm getting a little stiff in the hinges. He's a sober, silent sort of fellow, who minds his own business, and he was a widower when I came here—Trehearn is his name, James Trehearn. The Scotch sisters would not admit that there was anything wrong about the house, but when November came they gave me warning that they were going, on the ground that the chapel was such a long walk from here, being in the next parish, and that they could not possibly go to our church. But the younger one came back in the spring, and as soon as the banns could be published she was married to James Trehearn by the vicar, and she seems to have had no scruples about hearing him preach since then. I'm quite satisfied, if she is! The couple live in a small cottage that looks over the churchyard.

I suppose you are wondering what all this has to do with what I was talking about. I'm alone so much that when an old friend comes to see me, I sometimes go on talking just for the sake of hearing my own voice. But in this case there is really a connection of ideas. It was James Trehearn who buried poor Mrs. Pratt, and her husband after her in the same grave, and it's not far from the back of his cottage. That's the connection in my mind, you see. It's plain enough. He knows something; I'm quite sure that he does, by his manner, though he's such a reticent beggar.

Yes, I'm alone in the house at night now, for Mrs. Trehearn does everything herself, and when I have a friend the sexton's niece comes in to wait on the table. He takes his wife home every evening in winter, but in summer, when there's light, she goes by herself. She's not a nervous woman, but she's less sure than she used to be that there are no bogies in England worth a Scotch-woman's notice. Isn't it amusing, the idea that Scotland has a monopoly of the supernatural? Odd sort of national pride, I call that, don't you?

That's a good fire, isn't it? When drift-wood gets started at last there's nothing like it, I think. Yes, we get lots of it, for I'm sorry to say there are still a great many wrecks about here. It's a lonely coast, and you may have all the wood you want for the trouble of bringing it in. Trehearn and I borrow a cart now and then, and load it between here and the Spit. I hate a coal fire when I can get wood of any sort. A log is company, even if it's only a piece of a deck-beam or timber sawn off, and the salt in it makes pretty sparks. See how they fly, like Japanese hand-fireworks! Upon my word, with an old friend and a good fire and a pipe, one forgets all about that thing upstairs, especially now that the wind has moderated. It's only a lull, though, and it will blow a gale before morning.

You think you would like to see the skull? I've no objection. There's no reason why you shouldn't have a look at it, and you never saw a more perfect one in your life, except that there are two front teeth missing in the lower jaw.

Oh yes—I had not told you about the jaw yet. Trehearn found it in the garden last spring when he was digging a pit for a new asparagus bed. You know we make asparagus beds six or eight feet deep here. Yes, yes-- I had forgotten to tell you that. He was digging straight down, just as he digs a grave; if you want a good asparagus bed made, I advise you to get a sexton to make it for you. Those fellows have a wonderful knack at that sort of digging.

Trehearn had got down about three feet when he cut into a mass of white lime in the side of the trench. He had noticed that the earth was a little looser there, though he says it had not been disturbed for a number of years. I suppose he thought that even old lime might not be good for asparagus, so he broke it out and threw it up. It was pretty hard, he says, in biggish lumps, and out of sheer force of habit he cracked the lumps with his spade as they lay outside the pit beside him; the jawbone of a skull dropped out of one of the pieces. He thinks he must have knocked out the two front teeth in breaking up the lime, but he did not see them anywhere. He's a very experienced man in such things, as you may imagine, and he said at once that the jaw had probably belonged to a young woman, and that the teeth had been complete when she died. He brought it to me, and

asked me if I wanted to keep it ; if I did not, he said he would drop it into the next grave he made in the churchyard, as he supposed it was a Christian jaw, and ought to have decent burial, wherever the rest of the body might be. I told him that doctors often put bones into quicklime to whiten them nicely, and that I supposed Dr. Pratt had once had a little lime pit in the garden for that purpose, and had forgotten the jaw. Trehearn looked at me quietly.

"Maybe it fitted that skull that used to be in the cupboard upstairs, sir," he said. "Maybe Dr. Pratt had put the skull into the lime to clean it, or something, and when he took it out he left the lower jaw behind. There's some human hair sticking in the lime, sir."

I saw there was, and that was what Trehearn said. If he did not suspect something, why in the world should he have suggested that the jaw might fit the skull? Besides, it did. That's proof that he knows more than he cares to tell. Do you suppose he looked before she was buried? Or perhaps—when he buried Luke in the same grave——

Well, well, it's of no use to go over that, is it? I said I would keep the jaw with the skull, and I took it upstairs and fitted it into its place. There's not the slightest doubt about the two belonging together, and together they are.

Trehearn knows several things. We were talking about plastering the kitchen a while ago, and he happened to remember that it had not been done since the very week when Mrs. Pratt died. He did not say that the mason must have left some lime on the place, but he thought it, and that it was the very same lime he had found in the asparagus pit. He knows a lot. Trehearn is one of your silent beggars who can put two and two together. That grave is very near the back of his cottage, too, and he's one of the quickest men with a spade I ever saw. If he wanted to know the truth, he could, and no one else would ever be the wiser unless he chose to tell. In a quiet village like ours, people don't go and spend the night in the churchyard to see whether the sexton potters about by himself between ten o'clock and daylight.

What is awful to think of, is Luke's deliberation, if he did it ; his cool certainty that no one would find him out ; above all, his nerve, for that must have been extraordinary. I sometimes think it's bad enough to live in the place where

it was done, if it really was done. I always put in the condition, you see, for the sake of his memory, and a little bit for my own sake, too.

I'll go upstairs and fetch the box in a minute. Let me light my pipe; there's no hurry! We had supper early, and it's only half-past nine o'clock. I never let a friend go to bed before twelve, or with less than three glasses—you may have as many more as you like, but you shan't have less, for the sake of old times.

It's breezing up again, do you hear? That was only a lull just now, and we are going to have a bad night.

A thing happened that made me start a little when I found that the jaw fitted exactly. I'm not very easily startled in that way myself, but I have seen people make a quick movement, drawing their breath sharply, when they had thought they were alone and suddenly turned and saw some one very near them. Nobody can call that fear. You wouldn't, would you? No. Well, just when I had set the jaw in its place under the skull, the teeth closed sharply on my finger. It felt exactly as if it were biting me hard, and I confess that I jumped before I realised that I had been pressing the jaw and the skull together with my other hand. I assure you I was not at all nervous. It was broad daylight, too, and a fine day, and the sun was streaming into the best bedroom. It would have been absurd to be nervous, and it was only a quick mistaken impression, but it really made me feel queer. Somehow it made me think of the funny verdict of the coroner's jury on Luke's death, "by the hand or teeth of some person or animal unknown." Ever since that I've wished I had seen those marks on his throat, though the lower jaw was missing then.

I have often seen a man do insane things with his hands that he does not realise at all. I once saw a man hanging on by an old awning stop with one hand, leaning backward, out-board, with all his weight on it, and he was just cutting the stop with the knife in his other hand when I got my arms round him. We were in mid-ocean, going twenty knots. He had not the smallest idea what he was doing; neither had I when I managed to pinch my finger between the teeth of that thing. I can feel it now. It was exactly as if it were alive and were trying to bite me. It would if it could, for I know it hates me, poor thing! Do you suppose that what

rattles about inside is really a bit of lead? Well, I'll get the box down presently, and if whatever it is happens to drop out into your hands that's your affair. If it's only a clod of earth or a pebble, the whole matter would be off my mind, and I don't believe I should ever think of the skull again; but somehow I cannot bring myself to shake out the bit of hard stuff myself. The mere idea that it may be lead makes me confoundedly uncomfortable, yet I've got the conviction that I shall know before long. I shall certainly know. I'm sure Trehearn knows, but he's such a silent beggar.

I'll go upstairs now and get it. What? You had better go with me? Ha, ha! do you think I'm afraid of a bandbox and a noise? Nonsense!

Bother the candle, it won't light! As if the ridiculous thing understood what it's wanted for! Look at that—the third match. They light fast enough for my pipe. There, do you see? It's a fresh box, just out of the tin safe where I keep the supply on account of the dampness. Oh, you think the wick of the candle may be damp, do you? All right, I'll light the beastly thing in the fire. That won't go out, at all events. Yes, it sputters a bit, but it will keep lighted now. It burns just like any other candle, doesn't it? The fact is, candles are not very good about here. I don't know where they come from, but they have a way of burning low occasionally, with a greenish flame that spits tiny sparks, and I'm often annoyed by their going out of themselves. It cannot be helped, for it will be long before we have electricity in our village. It really is rather a poor light, isn't it?

You think I had better leave you the candle and take the lamp, do you? I don't like to carry lamps about, that's the truth. I never dropped one in my life, but I have always thought I might, and it's so confoundedly dangerous if you do. Besides, I am pretty well used to these rotten candles by this time.

You may as well finish that glass while I'm getting it, for I don't mean to let you off with less than three before you go to bed. You won't have to go upstairs, either, for I've put you in the old study next to the surgery—that's where I live myself. The fact is, I never ask a friend to sleep upstairs now. The last man who did was Crackenthorpe, and he said he was kept awake all night. You remember old Crack, don't you? He stuck to the Service, and they've just made

him an admiral. Yes, I'm off now—unless the candle goes out. I couldn't help asking if you remembered Crackenthorpe. If any one had told us that the skinny little idiot he used to be was to turn out the most successful of the lot of us, we should have laughed at the idea, shouldn't we? You and I did not do badly, it's true—but I'm really going now. I don't mean to let you think that I've been putting it off by talking! As if there were anything to be afraid of! If I were scared, I should tell you so quite frankly, and get you to go upstairs with me.

Here's the box. I brought it down very carefully, so as not to disturb it, poor thing. You see, if it were shaken, the jaw might get separated from it again, and I'm sure it wouldn't like that. Yes, the candle went out as I was coming downstairs, but that was the draught from the leaky window on the landing. Did you hear anything? Yes, there was another scream. Am I pale, do you say? That's nothing. My heart is a little queer sometimes, and I went upstairs too fast. In fact, that's one reason why I really prefer to live altogether on the ground floor.

Wherever that shriek came from, it was not from the skull, for I had the box in my hand when I heard the noise, and here it is now; so we have proved definitely that the screams are produced by something else. I've no doubt I shall find out some day what makes them. Some crevice in the wall, of course, or a crack in a chimney, or a chink in the frame of a window. That's the way all ghost stories end in real life. Do you know, I'm jolly glad I thought of going up and bringing it down for you to see, for that last shriek settles the question. To think that I should have been so weak as to fancy that the poor skull could really cry out like a living thing!

Now I'll open the box, and we'll take it out and look at it under the bright light. It's rather awful to think that the poor lady used to sit there, in your chair, evening after evening, in just the same light, isn't it? But then—I've made up my mind that it's all rubbish from beginning to end, and that it's just an old skull that Luke had when he was a student; and perhaps he put it into the lime merely to whiten it, and could not find the jaw.

I made a seal on the string, you see, after I had put the jaw in its place, and I wrote on the cover. There's the old white label on it still, from the milliner's, addressed to Mrs. Pratt when the hat was sent to her, and as there was room I wrote on the edge: "A skull, once the property of the late Luke Pratt, M.D." I don't quite know why I wrote that, unless it was with the idea of explaining how the thing happened to be in my possession. I cannot help wondering sometimes what sort of hat it was that came in the bandbox. What colour was it, do you think? Was it a gay spring hat with a bobbing feather and pretty ribands? Strange that the very same box should hold the head that wore the finery—perhaps. No—we made up our minds that it just came from the hospital in London where Luke did his time. It's far better to look at it in that light, isn't it? There's no more connection between that skull and poor Mrs. Pratt than there was between my story about the lead and—

Good Lord! Take the lamp—don't let it go out, if you can help it—I'll have the window fastened again in a second—I say, what a gale! There, it's out! I told you so! Never mind, there's the firelight—I've got the window shut—the bolt was only half down. Was the box blown off the table? Where the deuce is it? There! That won't open again, for I've put up the bar. Good dodge, an old-fashioned bar—there's nothing like it. Now, you find the bandbox while I light the lamp. Confound those wretched matches! Yes, a pipe spill is better—it must light in the fire—I hadn't thought of it—thank you—there we are again. Now, where's the box? Yes, put it back on the table, and we'll open it.

That's the first time I have ever known the wind to burst that window open; but it was partly carelessness on my part when I last shut it. Yes, of course I heard the scream. It seemed to go all round the house before it broke in at the window. That proves that it's always been the wind and nothing else, doesn't it? When it was not the wind, it was my imagination. I've always been a very imaginative man: I must have been, though I did not know it. As we grow older we understand ourselves better, don't you know?

I'll have a drop of the Hulstkamp neat, by way of an exception, since you are filling up your glass. That damp gust chilled me, and with my rheumatic tendency I'm very

much afraid of a chill, for the cold sometimes seems to stick in my joints all winter when it once gets in.

By George, that's good stuff! I'll just light a fresh pipe, now that everything is snug again, and then we'll open the box. I'm so glad we heard that last scream together, with the skull here on the table between us, for a thing cannot possibly be in two places at the same time, and the noise most certainly came from outside as any noise the wind makes must. You thought you heard it scream through the room after the window was burst open? Oh yes, so did I, but that was natural enough when everything was open. Of course we heard the wind. What could one expect?

Look here, please. I want you to see that the seal is intact before we open the box together. Will you take my glasses? No, you have your own. All right. The seal is sound, you see, and you can read the words of the motto easily. "Sweet and low"—that's it—because the poem goes on "Wind of the Western sea," and says, "blow him again to me," and all that. Here is the seal on my watch-chain, where it's hung for more than forty years. My poor little wife gave it to me when I was courting, and I never had any other. It was just like her to think of those words--she was always fond of Tennyson.

It's of no use to cut the string, for it's fastened to the box, so I'll just break the wax and untie the knot, and afterward we'll seal it up again. You see, I like to feel that the thing is safe in its place, and that nobody can take it out. Not that I should suspect Trehearn of meddling with it, but I always feel that he knows a lot more than he tells.

You see, I've managed it without breaking the string, though when I fastened it I never expected to open the bandbox again. The lid comes off easily enough. There! Now look!

What? Nothing in it? Empty? It's gone, man, the skull is gone!

No, there's nothing the matter with me. I'm only trying to collect my thoughts. It's so strange. I'm positively certain that it was inside when I put on the seal last spring. I can't have imagined that: it's utterly impossible. If I ever took a stiff glass with a friend now and then, I would admit that I might have made some idiotic mistake when I had taken

too much. But I don't, and I never did. A pint of ale at supper and half a go of rum at bedtime was the most I ever took in my good days. I believe it's always we sober fellows who get rheumatism and gout! Yet there was my seal, and there is the empty bandbox. That's plain enough.

I say, I don't half like this. It's not right. There's something wrong about it, in my opinion. You needn't talk to me about supernatural manifestations, for I don't believe in them, not a little bit! Somebody must have tampered with the seal and stolen the skull. Sometimes, when I go out to work in the garden in summer, I leave my watch and chain on the table. Trehearn must have taken the seal then, and used it, for he would be quite sure that I should not come in for at least an hour.

If it was not Trehearn—oh, don't talk to me about the possibility that the thing has got out by itself! If it has, it must be somewhere about the house, in some out-of-the-way corner, waiting. We may come upon it anywhere, waiting for us, don't you know?—just waiting in the dark. Then it will scream at me; it will shriek at me in the dark, for it hates me, I tell you!

The bandbox is quite empty. We are not dreaming, either of us. There, I turn it upside down.

What's that? Something fell out as I turned it over. It's on the floor, it's near your feet, I know it is, and we must find it! Help me to find it, man. Have you got it? For God's sake, give it to me quickly!

Lead! I knew it when I heard it fall; I knew it couldn't be anything else by the little thud it made on the hearth-rug. So it was lead after all, and Luke did it.

I feel a little bit shaken up—not exactly nervous, you know, but badly shaken up, that's the fact. Anybody would, I should think. After all, you cannot say that it's fear of the thing, for I went up and brought it down—at least, I believed I was bringing it down, and that's the same thing, and by George, rather than give in to such silly nonsense, I'll take the box upstairs again and put it back in its place. It's not that. It's the certainty that the poor little woman came to her end in that way, by my fault, because I told the story. That's what is so dreadful. Somehow, I had always hoped that I should never be quite sure of it, but there is no doubting it now. Look at that!

Look at it! That little lump of lead with no particular shape. Think of what it did, man! Doesn't it make you shiver? He gave her something to make her sleep, of course, but there must have been one moment of awful agony. Think of having boiling lead poured into your brain. Think of it. She was dead before she could scream, but only think of—oh!—there it is again—it's just outside—I know it's just outside—I can't keep it out of my head!—oh!—oh!

You thought I had fainted? No, I wish I had, for it would have stopped sooner. It's all very well to say that it's only a noise, and that a noise never hurt anybody—you're as white as a shroud yourself. There's only one thing to be done, if we hope to close an eye to-night. We must find it and put it back into its bandbox and shut it up in the cupboard, where it likes to be. I don't know how it got out, but it wants to get in again. That's why it screams so awfully to-night—it was never so bad as this—never since I first . . .

Bury it? Yes, if we can find it, we'll bury it, if it takes us all night. We'll bury it six feet deep and ram down the earth over it, so that it shall never get out again, and if it screams we shall hardly hear it so deep down. Quick, we'll get the lantern and look for it. It cannot be far away; I'm sure it's just outside—it was coming in when I shut the window, I know it.

Yes, you're quite right. I'm losing my senses, and I must get hold of myself. Don't speak to me for a minute or two; I'll sit quite still and keep my eyes shut and repeat something I know. That's the best way.

"Add together the altitude, the latitude, and the polar distance, divide by two and subtract the altitude from the half-sum; then add the logarithm of the secant of the latitude, and cosecant of the polar distance, the cosine of the half-sum and the sine of the half-sum minus the altitude"—there! Don't say that I'm out of my senses, for my memory is all right, isn't it?

Of course, you may say that it's mechanical, and that we never forget the things we learned when we were boys and have used almost every day for a lifetime. But that's the very point. When a man is going crazy, it's the mechanical part of his mind that gets out of order and won't work right; he remembers things that never happened, or he sees things

that aren't real, or he hears noises when there is perfect silence. That's not what is the matter with either of us, is it?

Come, we'll get the lantern and go round the house. It's not raining—only blowing like old boots, as we used to say. The lantern is in the cupboard under the stairs in the hall, and I always keep it trimmed in case of a wreck.

No use to look for the thing? I don't see how you can say that. It was nonsense to talk of burying it, of course, for it doesn't want to be buried; it wants to go back into its bandbox and be taken upstairs, poor thing! Trehearn took it out, I know, and made the seal over again. Perhaps he took it to the churchyard, and he may have meant well. I daresay he thought that it would not scream any more if it were quietly laid in consecrated ground, near where it belongs. But it has come home. Yes, that's it. He's not half a bad fellow, Trehearn, and rather religiously inclined, I think. Does not that sound natural, and reasonable, and well meant? He supposed it screamed because it was not decently buried—with the rest. But he was wrong. How should he know that it screams at me because it hates me, and because it's my fault that there was that little lump of lead in it?

No use to look for it, anyhow? Nonsense! I tell you it wants to be found—hark! What's that knocking? Do you hear it? Knock—knock—knock—three times, then a pause, and then again. It has a hollow sound, hasn't it?

It has come home. I've heard that knock before. It wants to come in and be taken upstairs, in its box. It's at the front door.

Will you come with me? We'll take it in. Yes, I own that I don't like to go alone and open the door. The thing will roll in and stop against my foot, just as it did before, and the light will go out. I'm a good deal shaken by finding that bit of lead, and, besides, my heart isn't quite right—too much strong tobacco, perhaps. Besides, I'm quite willing to own that I'm a bit nervous to-night, if I never was before in my life.

That's right, come along! I'll take the box with me, so as not to come back. Do you hear the knocking? It's not like any other knocking I ever heard. If you will hold this door open, I can find the lantern under the stairs by the light

from this room without bringing the lamp into the hall—it would only go out.

The thing knows we are coming—hark ! It's impatient to get in. Don't shut the door till the lantern is ready, whatever you do. There will be the usual trouble with the matches, I suppose—no, the first one, by Jove ! I tell you it wants to get in, so there's no trouble. All right with that door now ; shut it, please. Now come and hold the lantern, for it's blowing so hard outside that I shall have to use both hands. That's it, hold the light low. Do you hear the knocking still ? Here goes—I'll open just enough, with my foot against the bottom of the door—now !

Catch it ! it's only the wind that blows it across the floor, that's all—there's half a hurricane outside, I tell you ! Have you got it ? The bandbox is on the table. One minute, and I'll have the bar up. There !

Why did you throw it into the box so roughly ? It doesn't like that, you know.

What do you say ? Bitten your hand ? Nonsense, man ! You did just what I did. You pressed the jaws together with your other hand and pinched yourself. Let me see. You don't mean to say you have drawn blood ? You must have squeezed hard, by Jove, for the skin is certainly torn. I'll give you some carbolic solution for it before we go to bed, for they say a scratch from a skull's tooth may go bad and give trouble.

Come inside again and let me see it by the lamp. I'll bring the bandbox—never mind the lantern, it may just as well burn in the hall, for I shall need it presently when I go up the stairs. Yes, shut the door if you will ; it makes it more cheerful and bright. Is your finger still bleeding ? I'll get you the carbolic in an instant ; just let me see the thing.

Ugh ! There's a drop of blood on the upper jaw. It's on the eye-tooth. Ghastly, isn't it ? When I saw it running along the floor of the hall, the strength almost went out of my hands, and I felt my knees bending ; then I understood that it was the gale, driving it over the smooth boards. You don't blame me ? No, I should think not ! We were boys together, and we've seen a thing or two, and we may just as well own to each other that we were both in a beastly funk when it slid across the floor at you. No wonder you pinched your finger picking it up, after that, if I did the same

thing out of sheer nervousness in broad daylight, with the sun streaming in on me.

Strange that the jaw should stick to it so closely, isn't it? I suppose it's the dampness, for it shuts like a vice—I have wiped off the drop of blood, for it was not nice to look at. I'm not going to try to open the jaws, don't be afraid! I shall not play any tricks with the poor thing, but I'll just seal the box again, and we'll take it upstairs and put it away where it wants to be. The wax is on the writing-table by the window. Thank you. It will be long before I leave my seal lying about again, for Trehearn to use, I can tell you. Explain? I don't explain natural phenomena, but if you choose to think that Trehearn had hidden it somewhere in the bushes, and that the gale blew it to the house against the door, and made it knock, as if it wanted to be let in, you're not thinking the impossible, and I'm quite ready to agree with you.

Do you see that? You can swear that you've actually seen me seal it this time, in case anything of the kind should occur again. The wax fastens the strings to the lid, which cannot possibly be lifted, even enough to get in one finger. You're quite satisfied, aren't you? Yes. Besides, I shall lock the cupboard and keep the key in my pocket hereafter.

Now we can take the lantern and go upstairs. Do you know? I'm very much inclined to agree with your theory that the wind blew it against the house. I'll go ahead, for I know the stairs; just hold the lantern near my feet as we go up. How the wind howls and whistles! Did you feel the sand on the floor under your shoes as we crossed the hall?

Yes—this is the door of the best bedroom. Hold up the lantern, please. This side, by the head of the bed. I left the cupboard open when I got the box. Isn't it queer how the faint odour of women's dresses will hang about an old closet for years? This is the shelf. You've seen me set the box there, and now you see me turn the key and put it into my pocket. So that's done!

Good-night. Are you sure you're quite comfortable? It's not much of a room, but I daresay you would as soon sleep here as upstairs to-night. If you want anything, sing out; there's only a lath and plaster partition between us. There's

not so much wind on this side by half. There's the Hollands, on the table, if you'll have one more nightcap. No? Well, do as you please. Good-night again, and don't dream about that thing if you can.

The following paragraph appeared in the *Penraddon News*, 23rd November, 1906:

MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF A RETIRED SEA CAPTAIN

The village of Tredcombe is much disturbed by the strange death of Captain Charles Braddock, and all sorts of impossible stories are circulating with regard to the circumstances, which certainly seem difficult of explanation. The retired captain, who had successively commanded in his time the largest and fastest liners belonging to one of the principal transatlantic steamship companies, was found dead in his bed on Tuesday morning in his own cottage, a quarter of a mile from the village. An examination was made at once by the local practitioner, which revealed the horrible fact that the deceased had been bitten in the throat by a human assailant, with such amazing force as to crush the windpipe and cause death. The marks of the teeth of both jaws were so plainly visible on the skin that they could be counted, but the perpetrator of the deed had evidently lost the two lower middle incisors. It is hoped that this peculiarity may help to identify the murderer, who can only be a dangerous escaped maniac. The deceased, though over sixty-five years of age, is said to have been a hale man of considerable physical strength, and it is remarkable that no signs of any struggle were visible in the room, nor could it be ascertained how the murderer had entered the house. Warning has been sent to all the insane asylums in the United Kingdom, but as yet no information has been received regarding the escape of any dangerous patient.

The Coroner's jury returned the somewhat singular verdict that Captain Braddock came to his death "by the hands or teeth of some person unknown." The local surgeon is said to have expressed privately the opinion that the maniac is a woman, a view he deduces from the small size of the jaws, as shown by the marks of the teeth. The whole affair is shrouded in mystery. Captain Braddock was a widower, and lived alone. He leaves no children.

[*Note*.—Students of ghost lore and haunted houses will find the foundation of the foregoing story in the legends about a skull which is still preserved in the farmhouse called Bettiscombe Manor, situated, I believe, on the Dorsetshire coast.]

T. F. POWYS

The Two Horns

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THE TWO HORNS

DR. SNOWBALL lived at Bollen. He had lived there for ever; that is to say, he had lived there for more than twenty years.

Dr. Snowball was exactly sixty-two years old when he married Miss Snow.

Miss Flora Snow was the daughter of Mr. Allen Snow, of Hatten, who had many daughters. Flora had been treated for the measles by Dr. Snowball. She was covered with spots from head to foot. Dr. Snowball said he had never seen such a crowd of red pimples. The pair were married at Easter, and the bells of Hatten Church rang merrily.

Dr. and Mrs. Snowball went for their honeymoon to Switzerland. The Doctor chose Switzerland for one reason in particular, his fear of thieves.

This matter needs an explanation.

Once, when Dr. Snowball was waiting for the 4.15 at Balsom Junction, on his way to Stonebridge, he sat in front of a painted picture. The colour of the picture reminded him of the spots on Flora's chest. How a mountain could look like a girl with measles he did not know. But still there was the resemblance.

Half-way up the mountain there were two little boys with bare legs and feathers in their hats, blowing two mountain horns. The boys were calling the cows up from a valley that, taking the given perspective of the picture, must have been fifty miles away.

The sight of these great horns pleased Dr. Snowball. If he could buy the like he could easily awaken the whole countryside in case the thieves came to Bollen. Dr. Snowball had always had this fear in his head, that one night robbers would break through his pantry window and steal his white sparrow. This stuffed sparrow he had purchased himself and valued very much. It was worth a few pence perhaps. But

Dr. Snowball could not rid his mind of the idea that the thieves would break in by his pantry window and steal the white sparrow. Incidentally, of course, they might murder him as well, but that would be nothing to the loss of the sparrow. This was why Dr. Snowball wanted the horns to raise the neighbourhood.

As soon as ever he reached Switzerland he began to inquire about the horns. At Basle he called at Cook's. The clerk looked at Mrs. Flora, who explained what her husband wanted. Cook's agent was very discreet and smiling, he gave all the advice he could in the circumstances.

At first Dr. Snowball was unsuccessful in his quest. Once he thought he heard a sound half-way up a mountain that might have been a horn blowing. Leaving his wife at the hotel, he climbed up as well as his age would allow him, but the further he got up the mountain the darker it became, for what he had really heard was a thunderstorm. Reaching a certain point, he saw that in order to get back to his hotel again he must go down. His courage, that had led him to clamber so far, now forsook him. He sat down upon a rock that jutted out of the snow rather like a horn, and waited. During that night and half the next day, twenty guides searched the mountain.

At last the Doctor was found.

After this accident Dr. Snowball tried a different plan. He advertised for horns. The day after the advertisement appeared everyone in the hotel, including the night porter, was awakened at three o'clock in the morning by the most terrible noise they had ever heard. Every cowman in the Canton had come there to blow. The manager rushed up to Dr. Snowball's apartment and begged him on his knees to come down and buy.

Dr. Snowball bought two horns. He chose the largest. He spent the rest of his honeymoon in learning to blow them.

Directly Dr. Snowball entered his own house at Bollen, he went to see if the white sparrow was safe. He ordered Flora to dust the sparrow. This she did most carefully. He then told her to put it upon the clock. Dr. Snowball hoped that if the thieves came they would take the clock and leave the white sparrow behind.

One day the Doctor asked the people of Bollen to come together upon the village green, because he wished them to

hear him blow the horns. Dr. Snowball carried the horns to the green under his arms as though they were blunderbusses. The people came out of their houses. Blacksmith Perry had a hammer in his hand. Sexton Hobbs a spade. Old Tom Bird, the tinker, came running from "The Black Swan" in a great hurry. Little Bertie had run into the inn screaming out "that Dr. Snowball was going to cut up Mrs. Best upon the green grass." Mrs. Best was a lady who had just died. Though in his cups, Tom Bird did not wish to miss the fun. As soon as old Tom arrived upon the green, Dr. Snowball blew one of the horns. Thinking the sound had come from heaven, Tom knelt down and began to pray. His prayer contained only great oaths. But he hoped the kind angels would translate them because he really wanted to be sorry for his sins.

After blowing the horns, Dr. Snowball told the people that if they ever heard that sound in the night they must come at once to Hill House, and catch the robbers, who would be getting in by the pantry window. He then carried the horns home again like blunderbusses. . . .

Half-way between Hatten and Bollen there was a moated Grange.

In the moat there grew bulrushes, little ducks, and yellow water-lilies.

In the Grange there lived Mrs. Lidden and young Caleb.

Young Caleb used to visit the Snows before Flora married. Mrs. Snow had wanted young Caleb for Nina. Why she thought Nina could catch young Caleb no one knew.

As soon as Doctor Snowball had been accepted by Flora, he started off to Stonebridge to buy the wedding-ring.

Young Caleb came to call that same afternoon at Hatten, and invited the newly engaged Flora to take a walk in the wood.

Nina was left behind to cry upon the sofa.

What happened in the wood no one knew. Young Caleb told his mother that they had looked for moorhens, and Flora had merely said at home that they climbed trees after mistletoe.

Young Caleb was known to the Doctor, who for some odd reason did not like him. He had attended him for mumps. "The young gentleman looked so silly," he said.

To the credit of Dr. Snowball let us remark here that this was the only time he was ever known to speak cynically about a patient. So we may see that Dr. Snowball did not like young Caleb. It was otherwise with Flora. The more she was with the Doctor the more her mind went back to that tree-climbing day. At length she decided in her heart that she must see young Caleb again. She went for a long walk in the wood.

There was one snug place between some bushes that she peeped into. She saw something lying upon the moss. This was her handkerchief. A shrew-mouse had nibbled out the name. Flora sat down in that place and scribbled a note. When she came out of the wood she gave the note to a child to carry to the moated Grange.

Dr. Snowball liked port wine. He would hold each glass before drinking up to the light, and as he drank he would look approvingly at the white sparrow. The evening after Flora had written her note he drank nine glasses. Dr. Snowball went to bed.

In the middle of the night Flora rose and dressed. Her husband slept soundly. She stole downstairs and left the house by the front door. As soon as she shut the door she remembered the new lock that had been put in that morning. It was the kind of lock that locked of itself when the door was shut.

Flora stood and trembled.

She forgot young Caleb. She forgot the note she had written asking him to come into the wood to climb trees. The door was shut and she had no latch-key.

Flora walked round the house. The wind blew cold, she shivered. She had dressed in such a hurry that she had forgotten some of her clothes. She wished herself in bed again beside her husband. She stopped in front of the pantry window and tried to open it.

Flora knew that Jane would never hear her. Jane always slept like a log—but her husband?

The latch of the pantry window was not securely fastened. Flora shook the window. She paused for a moment before having another try.

While she waited in the moonlight she chanced to look up. Something large like a blunderbuss was being poked out of the bedroom window above.

After the lightning the thunder.

The noise came. All the little hills of Bollen resounded with the sound of a horn.

Flora sneaked along in the shadow of the house and hid herself under the large laurel bush. From her hiding-place she could see the lights beginning to burn in the village. The enormous horns were being repeatedly blown.

The port did its work well, it was fruity and the Doctor blew.

The first person to come upon the scene was old Tom, who got the start of the others because he had slept in a ditch with his clothes on. When old Tom came into the Doctor's garden, an owl flew by. Tom chased the owl. The owl flew into the laurel bush. Old Tom peeped in. What he saw there impressed him in a strange manner. He scratched his head, wishing to tell someone.

He saw Dr. Snowball peering out of the front door of Hill House. He saw him silhouetted against the light, holding in his excitement the two horns above his head. Tom grinned, the Doctor looked so like Farmer Ford's bull. Old Tom told his secret to the Doctor.

The garden was now full of villagers. Blacksmith Perry was there, and Mr. Hobbs.

The port had helped the Doctor to blow, and now it helped his fears in another matter. He thought that the white sparrow had flown into the laurel bush. He peeped into the bush. After peeping in he turned to the people, thanked them for coming, gave them money, and sent them away.

When they were all gone he helped Flora to come out from her hiding-place.

He asked her whether she had found the white bird.

Flora caught gladly at the hint he gave, and replied that when he opened the front door, the white sparrow flew into its case again.

"She will never try to fly out again," Flora said.

JAN NERUDA

The Vampire

THE VAMPIRE

THE unpretentious steamer which plies daily between Constantinople and the Princes Islands landed us at Prinkipo, and we went ashore. There were only a few passengers, we two and a Polish family, father, mother, and the daughter with her fiancé. But no . . . there was someone else. A young fellow, a Greek, had joined the boat at Stamboul on the wooden bridge across the Golden Horn. We concluded, from the sketch-book which he was carrying, that he was an artist. He had long black curls down to his shoulders; his face was pale, and his dark eyes deeply set. At first I was interested in him; he was very obliging, and able to give a good deal of information about the country we were travelling in. But he talked too much, and after ten minutes I left him alone.

The Polish family, on the contrary, was very attractive. The old people were kindly and gave themselves no airs, the fiancé was young and distinguished-looking, a man of the world. They were going to spend the summer at Prinkipo; the daughter was delicate and needed the air of the South. The beautiful, pale girl looked as if she had just recovered from or just fallen a prey to a severe illness. She leant on her fiancé's arm, frequently stood still to catch her breath, and now and then a dry cough interrupted her whispered conversation. Whenever she coughed, her companion stopped and looked at her sympathetically, and when she returned his look, her eyes seemed to say: "It is nothing. . . . I am quite happy."

They believed in her recovery and their happiness.

The Greek, who had parted from us at the landing-stage, had recommended an hotel belonging to a Frenchman, and the family decided to take rooms there. The situation was not too high, the view exquisite, and the hotel offered every European comfort.

We lunched together, and when the midday heat had passed off a little, we all slowly walked up the slope to reach a pinewood and enjoy the view. We had no sooner found a suitable spot to rest in, when the Greek reappeared. He only bowed to us, looked round for a convenient place and sat down at a few steps' distance from us, opened his sketch-book and began to draw.

"I believe he is sitting with his back to the rock so that we should not see his drawing," I said.

"We don't want to," said the young Pole, "we have plenty of other things to look at."

After a while he added: "I believe he is using us as a foreground. . . . I don't mind."

Indeed, we had enough to look at. I do not think there can be a lovelier or happier place in the world than Prinkipo. Irene, the political martyr, a contemporary of Charlemagne, lived in exile here for a month. If I could have spent a month in this place, I should have felt enriched in memories for the rest of my life. Even the one day is unforgettable. The air was so pure and soft and clear that the eye soared as on downy wings from distance to distance. On the right the brown rocks of Asia rose from the sea, on the left, in the distance, were the blue, steep shores of Europe; near us Chalki, one of the nine islands of the Princes Archipelago, lay mute and eerie, with sombre cypress groves; it looked like a haunting dream. A huge building crowns the summit of the isle . . . it is a lunatic asylum.

The surface of the Sea of Marmora was covered with ripples, and played in all colours like a giant opal. In the distance it looked white as milk, near us it had a rosy shimmer, and between the two islands it glowed like a golden orange; the depth below was sapphire blue. Its loveliness was untroubled, no large ships were moving on it; only close to the shore two small boats, carrying the British flag, were cruising to and fro, a steam launch, about the size of a signalman's box, and a boat rowed by sailors; liquid silver seemed to drip from their oars when they lifted them rhythmically. Fearless dolphins tumbled about close to the craft, or leapt in long semicircles across the water. From time to time huge eagles sailed from continent to continent in noiseless flight.

The slope below our seat was covered with roses in full bloom, the air was saturated with their scent. Sounds of

music, vague and dreamy, rose to us from the arcades of the café on the shore.

We were all deeply affected; our conversation stopped, and we gave ourselves up entirely to the emotions called forth by the contemplation of this Paradise. The young Polish girl was lying on the grass with her head resting on her fiancé's breast. The delicate oval face took on a faint flush of colour, and suddenly tears welled forth from her blue eyes. Her fiancé understood her emotion, bent down and kissed them away, one by one. The mother saw it and wept like her daughter, and I . . . looking at the girl, I also felt as though my heart was too full.

"Here body and soul must recover," whispered the girl, "what a wonderful spot!"

"God knows, I have no enemies," said her father, "but if I had, and met them here, I should forgive them."

His voice was trembling.

Again there was silence; we all felt an unspeakably sweet emotion. Everyone was conscious of a world of happiness within him which he longed to share with all the world. As we all understood what the others felt, none of us talked.

We had hardly noticed that the Greek had closed his sketch-book after about an hour's work, and taken himself off with a slight acknowledgment of our presence. We remained.

When several hours had passed, and the sky had begun to take on the purple tint which makes the South so attractive, the mother reminded us that it was time to go in. We descended in the direction of the hotel, slowly but with buoyant steps, like children free from care.

We sat down in an open veranda in front of the hotel. We had no sooner settled down when we heard sounds of quarrelling and abuse below us. Our Greek seemed to have an altercation with the landlord, and we listened to amuse ourselves. The conversation did not last long.

"If it weren't that I had to consider other guests . . ." said the landlord, while he came up the veranda steps.

"Pray," said the young Pole, when he came near to our table, "who is that gentleman? what is his name?"

"Oh, God knows what the fellow may call himself," said the landlord bad-temperedly, and looking daggers over the balustrade, "we call him the Vampire."

“An artist, I suppose?”

“Nice sort of an artist . . . paints nothing but corpses. No sooner has any one died hereabouts or in Constantinople, when the fellow is ready with his death mask, the very same day. That’s because he draws in advance . . . but the devil knows, he never makes a mistake, the vulture!”

The old Polish lady gave a shriek; her daughter had dropped into her arms in a dead faint, looking like death itself.

Her fiancé leapt down the steps at one bound, seized the Greek with one hand and his sketch-book with the other.

We ran down after him; both men were rolling in the dust.

The sketch-book flew open, the leaves were scattered, and we saw on one of them a striking portrait of the young girl. Her eyes were closed; a myrtle-wreath encircled her forehead.

S. L. DENNIS

The Second Awakening of a Magician

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THE SECOND AWAKENING OF A MAGICIAN

THE evening show was over. From the flapping entrance of the circus tent a small audience trooped out into the windy darkness: a few couples drawing closer as they disappeared into the night; a string of tittering girls, arms linked, bubbling with excitement and glancing back over their shoulders at the group of noisy youths slouching behind; two or three smart people who had been sitting self-consciously in the special screened-off enclosure, grown-ups in whose hearts, perhaps, a delight in spangles and sawdust had lingered since childhood, and who, in spite of a feeling of disappointment after every visit, still returned to the fruitless search for the glamour of those dream days; and last but not least a straggling, shouting, ragged mob of urchins, sticky with sweets and oranges, most of whom had crawled under the sides of the tent and evaded with practised ease all efforts to catch them.

Gradually the paraffin flares which had glared above the ring and sent a yellow glow into the sky through the taut canvas died out. The wandering hand-lamps disappeared. Lights began to gleam in the little curtained windows of the caravans.

Presently the door of one of the vans opened, and, one after another, three figures were silhouetted against the bright background of the interior as they stood on the little platform at the top of the steps and bade good-bye to those inside. Rain drifted over them like a silver veil. The first was a great hulking man with immensely broad shoulders and a soft cap dragged down at an angle over one eye. Then came another man, slighter in build and hesitating in movement, with coat collar turned up to his ears and a broad-brimmed felt hat. A small dim hurricane lamp swung in his hand. Finally a woman in a belted mackintosh and a close-fitting tam-o'-shanter pattered quickly down the steps after them.

In a shabby little restaurant, the three presently sat in ghastly greenish-yellow gas light eating their supper. The place was empty but for them and the flabby, sandy-haired proprietor, who was making coffee with the aid of something from a bottle and boiling water in a battered black tin kettle. They were used to the shabbiness of the cheapest eating-houses; and they usually saw them at their worst, at the end of the day, hung with the stale fumes of bad tobacco and miscellaneous cooking. The very mirrors of the place were clouded with greyish-yellow condensation.

The woman sat next the wall, the big man opposite and the small fellow beside her. She jabbed her fork into a last, hard potato-chip, pushed her plate away and then, resting her elbows on the table, held her face in her hands, staring out of the window at the dim figures of two drunks reeling past on the pavement. Her eyes met for a moment the little yellow ones of the man opposite. His pupils enlarged and contracted; then she looked away.

"Vell," said the big man, smacking his lips and speaking in the thick unctuous tone and with the unpleasant accent characteristic of him, "and so, Joe Skender, you're going to Randall for a job when this show closes. Vell, I wish you plenty of luck, but I don't zink you get much. Ze conjurors they not wanted. As I was saying, it is different for me, Georgio Guzelli, I have ze fame of my strength and, of course, a vay viz ze managers." The man leered nastily. "Your wife, she will be O.K. Ze finest lady trapeze artist I know."

"Oh, Randall will get me in somewhere," replied the little man with a smile that was forced, for he knew in his heart that there was really little hope for him. It was true that there seemed no demand for second-rate conjurers. He only owed his present job to his wife's friendship with this nasty half-breed. He'd fight the brute if he only had the strength. Nina despised him, a little weakling of a conjurer. It had been different when he was younger and had some cash. They were happy then while the money lasted. He had to admit he was a weakling, who had made nothing of the decent share of chances that had come his way. And now he was in too deep a rut to climb out of. He was always admitting that to himself, but did nothing about it. Gradually he had sunk from a good vaudeville connection. This was

the lowest so far—a second-rate road-show, and that was closing now.

What a queer taste this coffee had! Out of the corner of his eyes Skender could see the other two watching him intently, though feigning not to. They'd drugged it probably. But what did it matter? Things were bound to come to a real crisis one day. She would be sure to go eventually. How damned silly to waste time over drugs. Why not get up now and walk off with that lout's great arm round her?

She was still with him when he blew out the candle beside the bed in their cold and dingy lodging-house room soon afterwards. He was very drowsy and had hardly time to cover himself with the clothes before mind and body lost contact.

Somewhere in the fuddled sleeping brain of Joe Skender, Star Magician, there was a department still in working order. The cells were fabricating there a queer multi-coloured patch-work of memories which was presently hung up before his mind's eye—and he dreamed. . . .

He was entering the little dark shop in a narrow backwater off Oxford Street, where in the old days he used to buy the apparatus for his tricks.

From behind a curtain at the back of the shop emerged the assistant who had always served him there. As this man leaned over the counter towards him and brushed aside a queer jumble of suspicious-looking indiarubber vegetables, he noticed the extraordinary length and thinness of his fingers, little more than bones and skin. Yet the face which grinned at him in the old familiar way was chubby enough, though perhaps a trifle doll-like, painted and waxen.

"What were you wanting to-day, Mr. Skender?" said the assistant, without seeming to move a muscle of his face.

The answer was spontaneous, welling up suddenly and irresistibly from the very depth of his soul. "Strength—strength—I want to be the strongest man who ever lived. I want to break up Guzelli; break him with my hands."

"I am afraid that is rather an expensive trick and scarcely suited to parlour performance."

"I do not mind what it costs. I'd give anything you ask for it. It is not for the parlour in any case. I'm working on the stage now."

That mask-like face still grinned. "The price of the trick with full instructions is . . ."

Skender did not catch the last word. "I don't care what it costs," he said. "I'll take it."

"Thank you very much, sir; I'll just get you the apparatus." The man went into a room behind the curtain at the back of the shop, and in which, as the curtain was drawn aside, a flickering reddish glow of firelight could be seen. He returned in a moment with a queer dark, shadowy thing hanging over his arm. It looked rather like a long, deep sack of black muslin with a dim, uncertain outline, though roughly a small man's size in breadth and height.

"Here you are, sir. One of the neatest contrivances we stock, and, of course, fully guaranteed. Will you take it?"

"I've said I will, and I hope it works better than some of the things I've had from here."

Skender saw the assistant let go the shadowy thing, which, instead of falling, moved towards him, flowing over the counter like a black mist. It seemed to hang round him for a moment; almost shutting out what little light there was in the shop, till that waxen grinning face became just a light splotch in the gloom. An instant more and his sight was clear again. Somehow he felt full of an extraordinary boisterousness. "Well," he asked, "how do I work it?"

"Perfectly simple—see, here is an ordinary poker. I'll tap it on the counter to prove it is solid—so. Will you take it now, please, and tie it in a knot?" "Tie it in a knot?" Skender took the "ordinary poker." It felt weightless in his hands and bent like a supple twig. The knot could be tied easily, though his hands seemed awkward and numb as he fumbled with this weird shadow of a fire-iron. But the shadow slipped from his hands and fell with a clatter on to the counter. The trick worked.

"Splendid. How much did you say?"

"Just this." The assistant suddenly leaned across the counter and stretched out a long arm as thin and bony as his hand towards Skender and, before he could move, drew from his mouth a little white shining ball, which gleamed even in the semi-darkness like a most wonderful iridescent opal. "That's all, thank you, sir. There cannot be change."

Skender was glad to have got off so easily. "I call that good value," he said. "Well, I must be off. Send me your

new catalogues, as usual." As he opened the door to go into the street he turned and saw with an utter horror that pierced him like a dagger of ice—saw the assistant slip off his face with a bony hand, and there beneath was just blackness, nothing. The man hung up his face beside the other masks on the wall and, taking another down, put it into place. The long, pointed, sallow face, the little eyes that gleamed like the glint of fire on copper, and the two horns, were unmistakable. Skender fled into the street and into emptiness. He awoke.

The early morning light filtered greyly in through dirty tattered lace curtains. The horror that possessed Skender at the end of the dream still clung to him, and he was covered with sweat. But the strange boisterousness of supernatural strength still lingered, too. He turned over. His wife was sleeping; her dark head lay on the far edge of her pillow. So she had not gone!

He crept out of bed, and had immediately to sit down on the edge again. There had been a strange lightness in his feet when he stood up—his legs seemed no longer to have to support a weight. He was wide awake now, and horror and joy struggled for mastery within him. He moved ghost-like towards the fire-place, and it was extraordinarily difficult to do so quietly, as he could hardly feel the floor.

The poker twisted like a dowser's rod, bending at his will; and going to the window for light he fumbled with the tying of a knot. He was shaking with joy at his strength. Snap. The thing broke. His wife moved and sat up in bed. He could see her dimly rubbing her eyes with one hand and with the other holding the clothes up to her chin. He came back to bed, and as he got in poked the pieces of metal underneath. He made up his mind that this power should be kept secret till the time came to use it. A blind lust and longing for revenge on Guzelli had driven out fear.

Ambition had begun to flow back into a faint heart. He suddenly realised that Nina had said something to him, but was now lying silent on her back close by his side. He felt that she was looking at him out of the corner of her eyes, and his arm went out to draw her unresisting to him. There was something of the old joy in her little cry as he kissed her.

The day passed in wild preparation for the evening's show. Skender was planning the most remarkable act the ring had

ever seen. Late in the afternoon, when the foremost grey tendrils of night were creeping down the narrow streets of the little town, he stole unseen into the "property" tent carrying over one shoulder a bundle of crowbars and lengths of gas-piping. A huge spherical iron weight dangled by a ring from a single finger. These things were hidden away under a pile of canvas sheeting.

Nina had been something of her old self to him early in the day, but now she seemed as cool as ever. Skender knew she must have been with Guzelli, and strained himself to the uttermost in resisting the temptation to show his strength to her before the evening. He had not been able to help "testing" the crowbars in the ironmonger's, bending them as easily as if they had been stair-rods. The shopman started to address him as "sir" at once, and to the fellow's breathless question he explained that he was giving the strong man act at the circus that night.

"I'd heard it was not much of a how, but you can bet I'll be there to-night," the fellow assured him, "I'll give you some free advertisement, too, and tell my friends the stuff you do your act with is genuine."

The blinding flares had been lit and hauled up into place on brackets two-thirds of the way up the great blue and red striped centre-pole of the tent. The "band," consisting of three sour-faced ruffians who played the cornet, trombone and drums respectively, and whose only uniform was dirty black braided jackets and peaked military caps worn on the backs of their heads, grumbled and spat as they lounged against the small rickety cart which served as a bandstand. In the stable-tent horses and little plump ponies were being groomed and decorated for the ring.

In the property tent, now in use as a dressing-room, Skender snapped on the dickey and ready-made black bow that turned his shiny blue suit into the "evening dress" in which tradition demanded he should perform. As he bent to pull on his coat he caught a glimpse through a tear in the canvas of Guzelli and Nina talking earnestly in a dark corner just by the ring entrance. They evidently thought they were hidden, and Guzelli took her in his arms. The magician's anger strained in him like a mad hell-hound on a leash. He snarled and went across to where his iron was hidden. There he twisted the metal to try and satisfy momentarily his craving

to break and tear with his hands—a lust which presently should be gluttony when he fought with Guzelli. He'd bend him back just like the pipe he held. He'd tear him like a rotten sack. Then he'd take her away. They wouldn't dare to arrest him. He'd laugh at their rifle bullets. He'd be the richest man in the world. And all this apparently for a little white ball bartered in a dream!

The ring-master beamed at a large audience as he came forward to announce the star turns. The ironmonger's assistant had evidently been busy, for the fame of the new strong man had spread, and the feeble pitiful tumbling of the two old clowns who moved like rusty clockwork toys was interrupted by cries of "We want to see the big strong man," "Where is Samson?"

A white horse with red ribbons threaded in mane and plaited tail and a red plume bobbing over his patient head cantered on. Nina in white breeches and a little red jacket was astride him. The drummer, cornet, and trombone redoubled their efforts to drown one another and the noise of the audience. Nina was "featuring" in several acts—at first as a rather moderate but (with great rarity) shapely equestrienne, and then, later on, as a really fine solo trapeze artist.

Skender's eye followed that pretty figure round and round the ring. He saw how her personality caught the crowd and heard shouts of "Encore" amidst the applause. He saw, too, her eyes gleaming at Guzelli coming on as she rode off, and curbed a surging desire to go and kill him there and then. She did not glance at him.

Skender watched the great giant of a man juggling with huge weights, a little screw of paper, a tennis ball; saw him drive a steel javelin a foot into the ground, burst a chain, break handcuffs and finally, his great trick, catch a heavy pole on the back of his neck and balance it there. The little conjurer grinned as he heard the voice of the irresponsible ironmonger's assistant shout that he wanted to see a strong man and not a Glaxo baby. He grinned into Guzelli's little brute eyes as he came off raging. The man lurched towards him as if to strike, but, meeting nothing but a continued grin, moved away mumbling. Skender stole out softly after him.

A "black art" table stood alone in the middle of the ring, looking very small and ineffective with its soiled velvet top. Hidden inside it were the guinea-pig and pigeon Skender

regularly produced from a "borrowed" hat. The ring-master in his most emphatic tones, as if to make the best of a bad act, was announcing "Joe Skender, the Modern Miracle Man from the London Halls," when a sudden roar of laughter drowned his bombast.

Framed in the painted and beflagged canvas of the ring-entrance was an extraordinary spectacle. Guzelli without his gladiatorial leopard's skin staggered there in the dirty white Roman tunic he wore underneath. He was as groggy on his legs as a thoroughly beaten heavy-weight boxer. But the most peculiar and ludicrous element of his costume was a large and battered top hat rammed down over his eyes and squashing his nose flat against his face. The powerful arms were bound tight against his sides by what appeared to be a metal pipe bent twice round him. Some unseen force seemed to be pushing him relentlessly into the ring. A band of metal similar to the one imprisoning his arms encircled his great bull neck and from this collar a long extension stretched back to the entrance. The laughter changed to a roar of applause and shouts when, after some yards of this rod had appeared, the power behind the scenes suddenly showed itself -- a little man in a shabby blue suit and with the giant's leopard's skin over his shoulder. Like a badly fitting halo Guzelli's gilded head-band rested on his ears. In one high-stretched hand the little man grasped the end of the metal rod and pushed forward the fallen gladiator. When well out into the ring he dropped the bundle of assorted iron-mongery which had been tucked under his free arm and the monstrous weight that had dangled from one finger.

The crowd was silent. Here was a new sensation. It was frightened, yet completely fascinated by the extraordinary display of supernatural strength. Even the little boys on the back benches stopped sucking their oranges. Many felt something was wrong, but the very strangeness of the sight held them motionless, in the grip of a nightmare spell. Guzelli and the iron ball entered together in a juggling feat. The crowbars were flung so hard into the ground that they disappeared altogether. Guzelli, caged in bent piping, was balanced upside-down on Skender's chin, was thrown up and caught, higher and higher at each throw, till at last he bounced against the canvas of the roof, making the whole ten shake.

Released from his bonds, Guzelli lay still on the ground inside the property tent. He was moaning a little and a trickle of blood ran down from one corner of his mouth. Skender grinned at his enemy, squatting beside him and with his face almost touching Guzelli's. His revenge could wait now till he'd seen Nina—but the demon of the blood-lust could no longer be stayed.

Nina was standing in her white cloak outside the tent when he came to her and they walked together the few yards to the ring entrance. In the darkness she could not see his blood-stained hands. "I've got to go up on the trapeze now and I feel shaky," she said, and then in a low trembling voice, "Joe, forgive me." In a glow of triumph he took her in his arms. . . .

Limp. Her head fallen queerly to one side. Her mouth discoloured. He let the body sink on to the grass and knelt beside her. He did not notice the knot of circus people who had gathered round, till someone asked him if she had fainted. "Crushed," he whispered in an agony.

The crowd was clapping and stamping impatiently. Mad with rage, he dashed into the ring with gigantic bounds. The crowd roared with laughter at his sudden flea-like hops.

The great centre pole caught his eye and he seized it with both hands. The tent shook as if a hurricane had struck it. One of the flares fell crashing to the ground in a pillar of flame. Panic crushed the crowd at its cruel blind fingers. Shrieks of the trampled, of those wedged beneath fallen piles of forms, mingled with the tearing of canvas. Skender tore the great pole from the ground and waved it, dragging out the guy-ropes till the vast canvas roof came flapping in upon the pole and the hanging flares. Flames roared up above him and he let go the pole. He was choking—burning. He clawed and tore desperately at the flaming canvas piled over him like a shroud of fire.

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Cold, grey, early morning light shining dimly through the dusty pane above the door into the lodging-house hall. Two weird white figures in the semi-darkness, one deadly still, strangely huddled and wound tightly in a torn sheet, the other a woman in a night-dress. Three flights of stairs above a gap had been smashed in the flimsy banister of the

landing outside a bedroom where was a double bed, empty but still warm. From a nail in the splintered woodwork hung a long cotton rag. The woman was weeping bitterly.

"I reckon," said the landlady to the doctor, "I reckon the poor gentleman walked in his sleep. Mrs. Skender said she woke up this mornin' to see him strugglin' and staggerin' out of the room wound up in his sheet, and before she could do anything, poor soul, he had fallen. I think, meself, he must have been awake when he fell, I heard him a-screamin' just as the railing broke away."

OSCAR WILDE

The Sphinx Without a Secret

THE SPHINX WITHOUT A SECRET

AN ETCHING

ONE afternoon I was sitting outside the Café de la Paix, watching the splendour and shabbiness of Parisian life, and wondering over my vermouth at the strange panorama of pride and poverty that was passing before me, when I heard someone call my name. I turned round and saw Lord Murchison. We had not met since we had been at college together, nearly ten years before, so I was delighted to come across him again, and we shook hands warmly. At Oxford we had been great friends. I had liked him immensely, he was so handsome, so high-spirited, and so honourable. We used to say of him that he would be the best of fellows, if he did not always speak the truth, but I think we really admired him all the more for his frankness. I found him a good deal changed. He looked anxious and puzzled, and seemed to be in doubt about something. I felt it could not be modern scepticism, for Murchison was the stoutest of Tories, and believed in the Pentateuch as firmly as he believed in the House of Peers; so I concluded that it was a woman, and asked him if he was married yet.

"I don't understand women well enough," he answered.

"My dear Gerald," I said, "women are meant to be loved, not to be understood."

"I cannot love where I cannot trust," he replied.

"I believe you have a mystery in your life, Gerald," I exclaimed; "tell me about it."

"Let us go for a drive," he answered, "it is too crowded here. No, not a yellow carriage, any other colour--there, that dark green one will do"; and in a few moments we were trotting down the boulevard in the direction of the Madeleine.

"Where shall we go to?" I said.

"Oh, anywhere you like!" he answered--"to the restaurant in the Bois; we will dine there, and you shall tell me all about yourself."

"I want to hear about you first," I said. "Tell me your mystery."

He took from his pocket a little silver-clasped morocco case, and handed it to me. I opened it. Inside there was the photograph of a woman. She was tall and slight, and strangely picturesque with her large vague eyes and loosened hair. She looked like a *clairvoyante*, and was wrapped in rich furs.

"What do you think of that face?" he said; "is it truthful?"

I examined it carefully. It seemed to me the face of someone who had a secret, but whether that secret was good or evil I could not say. Its beauty was a beauty moulded out of many mysteries—the beauty in fact, which is psychological, not plastic—and the faint smile that just played across the lips was far too subtle to be really sweet.

"Well," he cried impatiently, "what do you say?"

"She is the Gioconda in sables," I answered. "Let me know all about her."

"Not now," he said; "after dinner," and began to talk of other things.

When the waiter brought us our coffee and cigarettes I reminded Gerald of his promise. He rose from his seat, walked two or three times up and down the room, and, sinking into an arm-chair, told me the following story:—

"One evening," he said, "I was walking down Bond Street about five o'clock. There was a terrific crush of carriages, and the traffic was almost stopped. Close to the pavement was standing a little yellow brougham, which, for some reason or other, attracted my attention. As I passed by there looked out from it the face I showed you this afternoon. It fascinated me immediately. All that night I kept thinking of it, and all the next day. I wandered up and down that wretched Row, peering into every carriage, and waiting for the yellow brougham; but I could not find *ma belle inconnue*, and at last I began to think she was merely a dream. About a week afterwards I was dining with Madame de Rastail. Dinner was for eight o'clock; but at half-past eight we were still waiting in the drawing-room. Finally the servant threw open the door, and announced Lady Alroy. It was the woman I had been looking for. She came in very slowly, looking like a moonbeam in grey lace, and, to my intense delight, I was asked to take her in to dinner. After

we had sat down, I remarked quite innocently, 'I think I caught sight of you in Bond Street some time ago, Lady Alroy.' She grew very pale, and said to me in a low voice, 'Pray do not talk so loud; you may be overheard.' I felt miserable at having made such a bad beginning, and plunged recklessly into the subject of the French plays. She spoke very little, always in the same low musical voice, and seemed as if she was afraid of some one listening. I fell passionately, stupidly in love, and the indefinable atmosphere of mystery that surrounded her excited my most ardent curiosity. When she was going away, which she did very soon after dinner, I asked her if I might call and see her. She hesitated for a moment, glanced round to see if anyone was near us, and then said, 'Yes; to-morrow at a quarter to five.' I begged Madame de Rastail to tell me about her; but all that I could learn was that she was a widow with a beautiful house in Park Lane, and as some scientific bore began a dissertation on widows, as exemplifying the survival of the matrimonially fittest, I left and went home.

"The next day I arrived at Park Lane punctual to the moment, but was told by the butler that Lady Alroy had just gone out. I went down to the club quite unhappy and very much puzzled, and after long consideration wrote her a letter, asking if I might be allowed to try my chance some other afternoon. I had no answer for several days, but at last I got a little note saying she would be at home on Sunday at four and with this extraordinary postscript: 'Please do not write to me here again; I will explain when I see you.' On Sunday she received me, and was perfectly charming; but when I was going away she begged of me, if I ever had occasion to write to her again, to address my letter to 'Mrs. Knox, care of Whittaker's Library, Green Street.' 'There are reasons,' she said, 'why I cannot receive letters in my own house.'

"All through the season I saw a great deal of her, and the atmosphere of mystery never left her. Sometimes I thought she was in the power of some man, but she looked so unapproachable that I could not believe it. It was really very difficult for me to come to any conclusion, for she was like one of those strange crystals that one sees in museums, which are at one moment clear, and at another clouded. At last I determined to ask her to be my wife: I was sick and tired

of the incessant secrecy that she imposed on all my visits, and on the few letters I sent her. I wrote to her at the library to ask her if she could see me the following Monday at six. She answered yes, and I was in the seventh heaven of delight. I was infatuated with her : in spite of the mystery, I thought then—in consequence of it, I see now. No ; it was the woman herself I loved. The mystery troubled me, maddened me. Why did chance put me in its track ? ”

“ You discovered it, then ? ” I cried.

“ I fear so,” he answered. “ You can judge for yourself.”

“ When Monday came round I went to lunch with my uncle, and about four o’clock found myself in the Marylebone Road. My uncle, you know, lives in Regent’s Park. I wanted to get to Piccadilly, and took a short cut through a lot of shabby little streets. Suddenly I saw in front of me Lady Alroy, deeply veiled and walking very fast. On coming to the last house in the street, she went up the steps, took out a latch-key, and let herself in. ‘ Here is the mystery,’ I said to myself ; and I hurried on and examined the house. It seemed a sort of place for letting lodgings. On the doorstep lay her handkerchief, which she had dropped. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. Then I began to consider what I should do. I came to the conclusion that I had no right to spy on her, and I drove down to the club. At six I called to see her. She was lying on a sofa, in a tea-gown of silver tissue looped up by some strange moonstones that she always wore. She was looking quite lovely. ‘ I am so glad to see you,’ she said ; ‘ I have not been out all day.’ I stared at her in amazement, and pulling the handkerchief out of my pocket, handed it to her. ‘ You dropped this in Cumnor Street this afternoon, Lady Alroy,’ I said very calmly. She looked at me in terror, but made no attempt to take the handkerchief. ‘ What were you doing there ? ’ I asked. ‘ What right have you to question me ? ’ she answered. ‘ The right of a man who loves you,’ I replied ; ‘ I came here to ask you to be my wife.’ She hid her face in her hands, and burst into floods of tears. ‘ You must tell me,’ I continued. She stood up, and, looking me straight in the face, said, ‘ Lord Murchison, there is nothing to tell you.’—‘ You went to meet some one,’ I cried ; ‘ this is your mystery.’ She grew dreadfully white, and said, ‘ I went to meet no one.’—‘ Can’t you tell the truth ? ’ I exclaimed. ‘ I have told it,’ she replied. I was mad.

frantic ; I don't know what I said, but I said terrible things to her. Finally I rushed out of the house. She wrote me a letter the next day ; I sent it back unopened, and started for Norway with Alan Colville. After a month I came back, and the first thing I saw in the *Morning Post* was the death of Lady Alroy. She had caught a chill at the Opera, and had died in five days of congestion of the lungs. I shut myself up and saw no one. I had loved her so much, I had loved her so madly. Good God ! how I had loved that woman ! ”

“ You went to the street, to the house in it ? ” I said.

“ Yes,” he answered.

“ One day I went to Cumnor Street. I could not help it ; I was tortured with doubt. I knocked at the door, and a respectable-looking woman opened it to me. I asked her if she had any rooms to let. ‘ Well, sir,’ she replied, ‘ the drawing-rooms are supposed to be let ; but I have not seen the lady for three months, and as rent is owing on them, you can have them.’—‘ Is this the lady ? ’ I said, showing the photograph. ‘ That’s her, sure enough,’ she exclaimed ; ‘ and when is she coming back, sir ? ’—‘ The lady is dead,’ I replied. ‘ Oh, sir, I hope not ! ’ said the woman ; ‘ she was my best lodger. She paid me three guineas a week merely to sit in my drawing-room now and then.’—‘ She met some one here ? ’ I said ; but the woman assured me that it was not so, that she always came alone, and saw no one. ‘ What on earth did she do here ? ’ I cried. ‘ She simply sat in the drawing-room, sir, reading books, and sometimes had tea,’ the woman answered. I did not know what to say, so I gave her a sovereign and went away. Now, what do you think it all meant ? You don’t believe the woman was telling the truth ? ”

“ I do.”

“ Then why did Lady Alroy go there ? ”

“ My dear Gerald,” I answered, “ Lady Alroy was simply a woman with a mania for mystery. She took these rooms for the pleasure of going there with her veil down, and imagining she was a heroine. She had a passion for secrecy, but she herself was merely a Sphinx without a secret.”

“ Do you really think so ? ”

“ I am sure of it,” I replied.

He took out the morocco case, opened it, and looked at the photograph. “ I wonder ? ” he said at last.

CHARLES DAVY

The Vanishing Trick

THE VANISHING TRICK

I AM a conjuror—out of work. I shall have to get back to it, because it's my living. But not at once. My hands isn't steady yet.

Most of my jobs are private—smoking concerts, bazaars, parties, and so on. I'm pretty good with cards and I don't mind working under people's noses. In the summer I generally fix up with a concert party, round the seaside towns. I can take a turn in a chorus, had to learn how, for that. It's a change from town work and keeps you going through August.

My bad luck started when I got a job at a church bazaar at Hastings. I was due at the hall early in the afternoon; so I went down in the morning and took a walk along the promenade—I'm fond of the sea. I knew I'd want a bit of food before the show; I looked out for a place, and presently I saw a little hotel—"open to non-residents." I thought that would suit me because I like my meals quiet, and sure enough there were only three other people there and they'd started ahead of me. A funny little waiter was running round, and as soon as I saw him, I knew I'd seen him before—where, I couldn't think. I fancied he knew me, too, but he didn't want to show it. So I sat wondering—and then I remembered.

It had been while I was up on the East Coast, the summer before. I was with a concert party, a good one. We had the pier pavilion at Birling for a fortnight, changing the programme, of course, a bit every day. I was working a vanishing trick, among others. Just the usual thing—vanishing a girl from a box and finding her in a cabinet. Vanishing tricks are always popular—I used to do it at almost every performance. I'd picked up the box second-hand. It was old-fashioned, but it was simple and fairly quick. It never let me down.

Well, one morning I'd gone to the pavilion for letters. Afterwards, I was standing on the pier, watching some old fellows fishing, when a little middle-aged man came and stood beside me.

I thought I'd seen him in the audience a few nights before, but I wasn't sure. After a bit he said: "You're the conjuror, aren't you? I saw your performance. I hope you don't mind my speaking to you?"

He seemed nervous, so I said no, I didn't mind; what did he want? Anything I could do for him?

"Yes," he said, "I had an idea. Now that box trick of yours—when you vanish the girl—that's a good one." He looked at me, a quick sort of anxious look. "But it's got a weak spot, hasn't it?"

I thought he was going to tell me how it was done. There's always someone in every audience who knows all the tricks better than you do. So to humour him I just said, "Oh, what's that?"

"You use a confederate," he said. "That spoils it. Now, this is my idea. Why don't you get someone from the audience and vanish *him*?"

This was a new one to me. I'd never thought of it—never heard of anyone trying it. How easy d'you think it'd be to get someone to step on the stage and lie down in a box? Besides, those boxes aren't automatic—only I wasn't going to say so, straight off.

"All right," I said, "but who'd come? No chance of it."

"I'd come," he said. "Why not take me on—show me how to do it? I don't look like a confederate, do I?"

He was right there. He was short, perhaps fifty, with a drooping moustache and blinking eyes—the kind of man you might find behind the counter of a little shop of his own. No one'd ever think he was part of the show.

"What's the idea?" I said. "Want to see how it's done?"

"No," he said. "Never mind that. I just want a chance to do it. I'm small—you want a small man, don't you?"

"He'd have to be pretty small," I said. I began to see points in the idea. A bit of novelty always goes down well. I knew there was nobody in the pavilion just then. "Look here," I said, "if you're serious, we'll have a rehearsal. I don't mind trying it—but you wouldn't get anything for it, you know. Wouldn't be worth my while."

He shook his head. I could see he was absolutely set on the idea. Probably hadn't ever thought I'd agree.

"I don't want anything," he said. "It's just my fancy. You show me now, can you? It won't take long, will it?"

Well, to cut the story short, I took him inside, got the box out and showed him how it worked. He just had to press a catch and slip down under the stage, through a trap. Then he had to go round and work the false door of the cabinet, from the back. It was simple enough, and he was quick at it, too.

"That's all right," he said, when he'd done it twice. "I'll be here on Tuesday. I've promised to bring the wife. I'll get a seat at the end of a row. You ask for someone to step up and then look at me, see? Make it easy for me."

I still didn't know what he was getting at, but I agreed. I thought very likely he wouldn't be there, after all, when it came to the point. Anyway, I thought, I'd look out for him, and if he wasn't there, I'd do the trick in the ordinary way. I didn't see that much harm could come from trying it.

As soon as I'd agreed, he scuttled off. Seemed to be in a hurry. I stayed on the pier a bit, watching the fishing and wondering what he was up to. By the time I went home I was beginning to feel sorry I'd ever listened to him.

However, Tuesday night came and there he was in the front row with a big, powerful-looking woman, red-faced, next to him. He caught my eye, but gave no sign. At length I brought out the box trick, almost meaning to do it in the usual way. But I'd promised him. So I went to the front of the stage and worked a bit of patter—about anyone who wanted to make himself scarce, and so on. I looked at my little man—he was out of his seat like a knife. I thought the woman next to him—his wife, I supposed—was mighty surprised, but she didn't say anything. Perhaps she was too surprised. She just stared, very red in the face.

Well, I could see there were people in the audience who knew my little man. That was good for me. Made it seem more natural. I put him in the box, waved the wand, opened the box—and he'd gone all right. The audience clapped, but the red-faced woman didn't clap. She'd shut her mouth very tight, and I thought the little man was going to catch it when he got home.

Still, that wasn't my affair. He'd asked for it. I did a

little business—taking sides out of the box, tapping them and so on, to give him time. Then I went to open the cabinet. It was empty. The audience began to laugh—I had to think of something quickly. Fortunately I've learnt how to keep my head—you've got to in conjuring. I shut the cabinet, went to the front of the stage and began to talk about dematerialising—said my assistant had to dematerialise himself in the box and rematerialise in the cabinet, and that needed time. In a minute or two he'd be there all right, I said—not believing it, because I thought he'd lost his nerve. Still, I had to say something. Then I got on quickly to another trick—just an easy one with coloured handkerchiefs—and while I worked I thought out what I should say if the cabinet was empty again.

Well, I had to open it again as soon as I'd finished with the handkerchiefs and, of course, it was still empty. So I signed for someone in the wings to fetch it off and went back to try and put over a yarn about vanishing people too thoroughly. I was just getting the audience to listen when out of the corner of my eye I saw the red-faced woman stand up. I knew she was going to shout at me, and she did—in a hoarse kind of voice, very unpleasant. Wanted to know what I'd done with her husband. Where'd he gone?

I said I wished I knew. Of course the audience laughed, and when the woman came up and shook her umbrella at me over the footlights, they laughed all the more. Someone called out: "He's gone off with Elsie—oh, Ma!"—but the woman wasn't worrying. She was set on me. While we were arguing and the audience was laughing, the manager came on—told me to get off quick—send on the others for a chorus. I didn't wait. I roused up the others, and I was just going to look for my little man when I met the manager coming round to the back with the woman. She glared at me. The manager said, very sharply: "Where'd he be? Underneath somewhere?"

Well, we looked in every corner—under the stage, in the dressing-rooms—the woman snorting, probing with her umbrella, getting redder and redder. Fortunately the show had got started again all right and it was nearly over, anyway.

We went out on to the pier—it was a dark, windy night—

and looked all round, but there was absolutely no sign of my little man. He really had vanished—clean gone. At last the woman turned on us like a fury—said she was going straight to the police, we'd all be arrested—I don't know what else. Seemed to think we'd done it on purpose. I was glad to see her go marching off down the pier, I can tell you, and just then the lights went on round the pavilion and the audience began to come out.

Next day, we had the police, of course—a sergeant, but he didn't stay long, just looked at the trap and asked a few questions. We weren't to blame, really, and he seemed to know something about the woman. We had a couple of reporters, too—wonderful publicity it all was, in the end. The place was packed that afternoon and again at night. The manager wanted us to stay another week, but he couldn't get the bookings altered in time. We had to move on, up the coast to Hunstanton. Even there it did us good. The papers were still running the story; they published the little man's photograph—my photograph. But they didn't find the little man—never a word or trace of him anywhere. Some people thought he'd jumped into the sea—temporarily insane, you know—only then his body would have been washed up sooner or later, and it never was.

And now, as I sat at lunch, I felt sure I'd found him at last. He was the waiter. He'd cut off his moustache, but I knew I wasn't wrong, particularly after I'd caught him looking at me in a funny, frightened sort of way, once or twice.

I waited till I'd almost finished and the other people had gone. Then I beckoned to him and said, "Been doing any more vanishing tricks lately?"

He didn't try to deny it. He glanced quickly over his shoulder, then bent down, resting one hand on the table, and said anxiously, "You aren't going to give me away, are you?"

"No," I said, "why should I? What are you doing here?"

"I'm all right here," he said, "if I can stay. I only want to be left alone."

"What happened to you that night?" I asked. "You framed it, I suppose, didn't you, to get away?"

He nodded. "Yes, I got away. I'm grateful. It was just what I wanted."

"But why all that trouble?" I said. "Why did you have to vanish out of a box?"

He looked round again, to see if the room was empty, I suppose. Then he drew a chair up to my table.

"I couldn't stay with my wife any more," he said. "D'you understand that? Your trick gave me an idea."

"I still don't see it," I said. "Why not just walk out of the house?"

"Ah," he said, gazing at me very seriously, "you're not married, perhaps?"

I admitted that I was not.

"Then you won't know," he said. "My wife wasn't one to give a man much freedom. We had a little business—fancy goods and confectionery. I had to mind the shop and in the evenings I never went out except with her. She had a firm hand—fair got me under. After a time you can't break loose. I don't know why, but you can't. Then I couldn't just walk off in daylight. The all knew me in the town. She'd have been after me too quick. That meant after dark, only I was never out alone in the evening. I thought your trick'd be just right—give me a start. See what I mean?"

He looked up at me, a puzzled kind of look. Didn't seem quite to know what he meant himself, but wanted me to understand it.

"You see, it was that *vanishing*," he said. "That's what I liked—just what I'd wanted, time and again. Never saw how I could do it. Then, when I saw your trick, I thought—if I could do that I'd be all right, out of it, quickly. I'd be away by myself and no questions asked. No questions, that was it."

"Well," I said, to humour him, "what did you do? Slip out of the theatre and run away? You got me into a nice mess, you know."

He nodded, but he didn't seem to hear my last words. I don't suppose he'd ever thought of that side of it. He'd just had his one idea—nothing else.

"Yes," he said, "I knew ther'd be no one about on the pier while the show was on. Just a turnstile to get out—they used to lock up the rest. I walked—walked to Yarmouth, all night. Came to London. No one had seen me. Got a waiter's job. I'd been a waiter before I was married.

Everything was all right—ought to have stayed there.”

“Why didn’t you?” I said. “How long have you been down here?”

“Month,” he said. “It’s quiet, you see. I like a quiet place. Only I’m afraid—” He dropped his voice and leant forward over the table—“I’m afraid they’re going to get on to me. I saw someone I knew the other day. I’m afraid I did.”

Well, I suppose I’d have gone on listening to him, but just then I caught sight of the clock. In half an hour I was due to start my show. I pushed back my chair.

“Here, let’s have the bill,” I said. “I’m late, talking to you.”

He got up but he didn’t give me the bill at once. He stood fumbling with his napkin.

“I’d be better in London,” he said. “I’m not going back, anyway—not for anything—not even if they find me.”

“I don’t want you to go back,” I said. “What’s it to me? I shan’t go about saying I’ve seen you. Let’s have the bill—that’s what I want.”

He glanced at me—he still didn’t move.

“You won’t?” he said. “No—I was scared when I saw you, but I don’t much mind. Anyway, I—”

I interrupted him, made him fetch the bill—sent him running for it. I hadn’t got time to waste. But in a way I was sorry when I’d gone and left him looking after me from the door. I didn’t want to scare him. Perhaps if I hadn’t been in such a hurry, I might have—but that can’t be helped now.

Well, I did my show and a second show again a bit later and caught a train at 7. In the train I thought of my little man. My belief was that he’d be back at Birling soon. To stay hidden for ever—no one can do it, not in this country. Anyway, he wasn’t the type. But I felt sorry for him. I remembered that woman.

In London, during the next week, I hadn’t much to do—one evening job and one kids’ party—it was near Christmas. For Boxing week I was booked—a music-hall down near Putney. I knew the place—always going to turn into a cinema, but never did, though they showed pictures on Sunday. It was twice nightly for me, but you have to take what you can get, nowadays.

It was on the Wednesday in that week that it happened—the first house. My act started at 6-50. I had a girl working with me, one I'd often had before—it's worth it, for a week. For the box trick she wore a special rig—used to go and put it on while I showed the box to the audience. On this Wednesday night she'd gone as usual and when I'd finished showing the box I looked round to see if she was ready. She wasn't there—but in the wings I saw my little man, in his waiter's clothes. He was looking straight at me with a queer kind of intent expression—standing quite still.

I was scared. I couldn't think how he'd got there or what he was doing, particularly in those clothes. I wondered, too, all in the same moment, what had happened to my girl. I felt something had gone wrong and was going to go more wrong if I didn't stop it.

But before I could do anything my little man was walking on to the stage, still staring at me with the same expression. He walked a bit stiffly, somehow—mechanically, almost. I suppose I might have turned him round and pushed him off. But almost anything's better than a scene on the stage, and somehow I couldn't push him off—I don't know why. The way he was walking on made me feel queer. I thought he'd determined to vanish again through my box, and that it wouldn't be easy to stop him. I just felt I'd better be quick. I wanted to get him in and get him vanished before anything happened.

I introduced him to the audience—said what I was going to do and so on, the usual thing. While I was speaking, I felt the audience go quiet—a sort of hush—all of a sudden. I glanced over my shoulder—my little man was still there, but he wasn't looking at me now—he was looking at the box. Then he began to get in of his own accord. I hadn't time to wonder about the audience. I had to attend to the box. I wanted to be sure he got in the right way. He did, but he seemed to fall in, and for a moment I almost thought he really had fallen. It was queer, but I had to get the box shut. A kind of murmur had started in the audience, and I fumbled, trying to be quick. As soon as I stood up and turned round, the murmur stopped—dead silence.

I got off a bit of patter, then turned back to the box, and as I turned, I saw out of the corner of my eye my girl assistant standing in the wings—staring at me, pale, I thought. I just

motioned to her to stay there. Then I threw the box open—and the next moment I was trying to get it shut, as quick as I could. My little man was still there, but he was all crumpled and crushed, his head smashed in—blood dripping out of the box.

After that I don't know quite what happened, except that I was trying to get the box shut because I didn't want the audience to see. I got it shut—then I remember the curtain coming down. The manager of the hall was on the stage and two of the hands were picking up the box to carry it off. I started to say something—"Look out—put it down—" but they paid no attention, and I found myself in the wings, with the next turn starting and the manager telling me I was drunk. Of course, that was silly—you can't do conjuring on drink—but I didn't stop to listen. I wanted the box opened and that thing in it taken away. I went over to the box and opened the top quickly—not the sides. You can believe me or not, but it was empty—clean empty. Not even a spot of blood.

After that I remember sitting down and the manager shaking me by the shoulder. He told me to get out—I was fired. He said it several times, but I didn't care. I just sat there, and after a bit I saw there was quite a crowd staring at me. I looked at the box—it was still empty. How could you explain that? I knew it was no use trying.

I got up and went to my dressing-room and the manager followed me. I only wanted to get out of the theatre, but the manager—he was Jewish—kept saying: "Why you act like that? What you think you do—play the fool by yourself, eh? Spoil my show, eh? What's the big idea?"

Then I saw what he meant and I asked him if he hadn't seen anyone with me on the stage. He stared and began to look a bit frightened, I thought. He said he'd seen no one—absolutely no one—so I knew I'd seen a ghost. I didn't tell him—just went on dressing, and after a moment I heard the door shut. I think he'd decided I was mad and didn't like staying with me.

When I was dressed I went out. The manager was there and several others—stage hands and folk from other acts—but no one spoke. They just stared at me. Then I saw my assistant. She looked white. I asked her where she'd been. She said she'd just been coming on—just leaving

her dressing-room—when she'd torn half her skirt off on a nail. She showed me the tear. It was a funny accident, but I didn't ask any more. I just told the manager I'd send for my stuff in the morning and went out. It was a fine night—early still. I found a pub and had a couple of brandies. Then I walked about the streets a bit and began to feel better. Only I didn't go home. I had a room in Kennington and I knew I should sit there thinking. I wanted company. So I went to a hotel and had another drink and took a room there and went to bed with the light on.

I suppose I slept because I found it was morning and the light still burning. Then I remembered—and I wondered if I really had been mad or dreaming the night before. In daylight you can't believe these things so easily. I was still wondering while I got dressed and had breakfast. Then I bought a paper, and on an inside page a paragraph jumped at me :

HOTEL TRAGEDY

WAITER FALLS DOWN LIFT SHAFT

Albert Creasey, waiter at the Magnolia Hotel, Russell Square, was killed last night through falling down the lift shaft from the top floor, where he had his own room. The tragedy occurred just before seven o'clock, shortly after Creasey had been visited in his room by a plain clothes police officer. Creasey, who had been at the hotel only since Sunday, apparently stayed in his room for a few minutes after the officer had left and then opened the lift gate on the top landing and stepped into the shaft.

It is understood that the visit of the police officer had no connection with any criminal proceedings.

Inquiries were being made for Creasey on behalf of his wife, with whom he had not lived for several months.

The name was right and the time was right. I knew I'd seen my little man just as he was walking to the lift and after he'd fallen.

Anyway, I've sold my box. I can't face that truck again.

GEORGE MEREDITH

*The Punishment of Shabpesh, the Persian,
on Khipil, the Builder*

THE PUNISHMENT OF SHAHPESH, THE PERSIAN, ON KHIPIL, THE BUILDER

THEY relate that Shahpesh, the Persian, commanded the building of a palace, and Khipil was his builder. The work lingered from the first year of the reign of Shahpesh even to his fourth. One day Shahpesh went to the river-side where it stood, to inspect it. Khipil was sitting on a marble slab among the stones and blocks; round him stretched lazily the masons and stonecutters and slaves of burden; and they with the curve of humorous enjoyment on their lips, for he was reciting to them adventures, interspersed with anecdotes and recitations and poetic instances, as was his wont. They were like pleased flocks whom the shepherd hath led to a pasture freshened with brooks, there to feed indolently; he, the shepherd, in the midst.

Now, the King said to him, "O Khipil, show me my palace where it standeth, for I desire to gratify my sight with its fairness."

Khipil abased himself before Shahpesh, and answered, " 'Tis even here, O King of the age, where thou delightest the earth with thy foot and the ear of thy slave with sweetness. Surely a site of vantage, one that dominateth earth, air, and water, which is the builder's first and chief requisition for a noble palace, a palace to fill foreign kings and sultans with the distraction of envy; and it is, O Sovereign of the time, a site, this site I have chosen, to occupy the tongues of travellers and awaken the flights of poets."

Shahpesh smiled and said, "The site is good! I laud the site! Likewise I laud the wisdom of Ebn Busrac, where he exclaims:

"Be sure, where Virtue faileth to appear,
For her a gorgeous mansion men will rear,
And day and night her praises will be heard,
Where never yet she spake a single word."

Then said he, "O Khipil, my builder, there was once a farm-servant that, having neglected in the seed-time to sow, took to singing the richness of his soil when it was harvest, in proof of which he displayed the abundance of weeds that coloured the land everywhere. Discover to me now the completeness of my halls and apartments, I pray thee, O Khipil, and be the excellence of thy construction made visible to me!"

Quoth Khipil, "To hear is to obey."

He conducted Shahpesh among the unfinished saloons and imperfect courts and roofless rooms, and by half-erected obelisks, and columns pierced and chipped, of the palace of his building. And he was bewildered at the words spoken by Shahpesh; but now the King exalted him, and admired the perfection of his craft, the greatness of his labour, the speediness of his construction. His assiduity; feigning not to behold his negligence.

Presently they went up winding balusters to a marble terrace, and the King said, "Such is thy devotion and constancy in toil, O Khipil, that thou shalt walk before me here."

He then commanded Khipil to precede him, and Khipil was heightened with the honour. When Khipil had paraded a short space he stopped quickly, and said to Shahpesh, "Here is, as it chanceth, a gap, O King! and we can go no further this way."

Shahpesh said, "All is perfect, and it is my will thou delay not to advance."

Khipil cried, "The gap is wide, O mighty King, and manifest, and it is an incomplete part of thy palace."

Then said Shahpesh, "O Khipil, I see no distinction between one part and another; excellent are all parts in beauty and proportion, and there can be no part incomplete in this palace that occupieth the builder four years in its building: so advance, do my bidding."

Khipil yet hesitated, for the gap was of many strides, and at the bottom of the gap was a deep water, and he one that knew not the motion of swimming. But Shahpesh ordered his guard to point their arrows in the direction of Khipil, and Khipil stepped forward hurriedly, and fell in the gap, and was swallowed by the water below. When he rose the second time, succour reached him, and he was drawn

to land trembling, his teeth chattering. And Shahpesh praised him, and said, "This is an apt contrivance for a bath, Khipil O my builder! well conceived; one that taketh by surprise; and it shall be thy reward daily when much talking hath fatigued thee."

Then he bade Khipil lead him to the hall of state. And when they were there Shahpesh said, "For a privilege, and as a mark of my approbation, I give thee permission to sit in the marble chair of yonder throne, even in my presence, O Khipil."

Khipil said, "Surely, O King, the chair is not yet executed."

And Shahpesh exclaimed, "If this be so, thou art but the length of thy measure on the ground, O talkative one!"

Khipil said, "Nay, 'tis not so, O King of splendours! blind that I am! yonder's indeed the chair."

And Khipil feared the King, and went to the place where the chair should be, and bent his body in a sitting posture, eyeing the King, and made pretence to sit in the chair of Shahpesh, as in conspiracy to amuse his master.

Then said Shahpesh, "For a token that I approve thy execution of the chair, thou shalt be honoured by remaining seated in it up to the hour of noon; but move thou to the right or to the left, showing thy soul insensible of the honour done thee, transfix'd thou shalt be with twenty arrows and five."

The King then left him with a guard of twenty-five of his body-guard; and they stood around him with bent bows, so that Khipil dared not move from his sitting posture. And the masons and the people crowded to see Khipil sitting on his master's chair, for it became rumoured about. When they beheld him sitting upon nothing, and he trembling to stir for fear of the loosening of the arrows, they laughed so that they rolled upon the floor of the hall, and the echoes of laughter were a thousand-fold. Surely the arrows of the guards swayed with the laughter that shook them.

Now, when the time had expired for his sitting in the chair, Shahpesh returned to him, and he was cramped, pitiable to see; and Shahpesh said, "Thou hast been exalted above men, O Khipil! for that thou didst execute for thy master has been found fitting for thee."

Then he bade Khipil lead the way to the noble gardens of dalliance and pleasure that he had planted and contrived.

And Khipil went in that state described by the poet, when we go draggingly, with remonstrating members,

Knowing a dreadful strength behind,
And a dark fate before.

They came to the gardens, and behold, these were full of weeds and nettles, the fountains dry, no tree to be seen—a desert. And Shahpesh cried, “This is indeed of admirable design, O Khipil! Feelest thou not the coolness of the fountains?—their refreshingness? Truly I am grateful to thee! And these flowers, pluck me now a handful, and tell me of their perfume.”

Khipil plucked a handful of the nettles that were there in the place of flowers, and put his nose to them before Shahpesh, till his nose was reddened; and desire to rub it waxed in him, and possessed him, and became a passion, so that he could scarce refrain from rubbing it even in the King’s presence. And the King encouraged him to sniff and enjoy their fragrance, repeating the poet’s words:

Methinks I am a lover and a child,
A little child and happy lover, both!
When by the breath of flowers I am beguiled
From sense of pain, and lulled in odorous sloth.
So I adore them, that no mistress sweet
Seems worthier of the love which they awake:
In innocence and beauty more complete,
Was never maiden cheek in morning lake.
Oh, while I live, surround me with fresh flowers,
Oh, when I die, then bury me in their bowers!

And the King said, “What sayest thou, O my builder? that is a fair quotation, applicable to thy feelings, one that expresseth them?”

Khipil answered, “’Tis eloquent, O great King! comprehensiveness would be its portion, but that it alludeth not to the delight of chafing.”

Then Shahpesh laughed, and cried, “Chafe not! it is an ill thing and a hideous! This nosegay, O Khipil, it is for thee to present to thy mistress. Truly she will receive thee well after its presentation! I will have it now sent in thy name, with word that thou followest quickly. And for thy nettled nose, surely if the whim seize thee that thou desirest its chafing, to thy neighbour is permitted what to thy hand is refused.”

The King set a guard upon Khipil to see that his orders were executed, and appointed a time for him to return to the gardens.

At the hour indicated Khipil stood before Shahpesh again. He was pale, saddened; his tongue drooped like the tongue of a heavy bell, that when it soundeth giveth forth mournful sounds only: he had also the look of one battered with many beatings. So the King said, "How of the presentation of the flowers of thy culture, O Khipil?"

He answered, "Surely, O King, she received me with wrath, and I am shamed by her."

And the King said, "How of my clemency in the matter of the chafing?"

Khipil answered, "O King of splendours! I made petition to my neighbours whom I met, accosting them civilly and with imploring, for I ached to chafe, and it was the very raging thirst of desire to chafe that was mine, devouring eagerness for solace of chafing. And they chafed me, O King; yet not in those parts which throbbed for the chafing, but in those which abhorred it."

Then Shahpesh smiled and said, "'Tis certain that the magnanimity of monarchs is as the rain that falleth, the sun that shineth: and in this spot it fertilizeth richness; in that encourageth rankness. So art thou but a weed, O Khipil! and my grace is thy chastisement."

Now, the King ceased not persecuting Khipil, under pretence of doing him honour and heaping favours on him. Three days and three nights was Khipil gasping without water, compelled to drink of the drought of the fountain, as an honour at the hands of the King. And he was seven days and seven nights made to stand with stretched arms, as they were the branches of a tree, in each hand a pomegranate. And Shahpesh brought the people of his court to regard the wondrous pomegranate-shoot planted by Khipil, very wondrous, and a new sort, worthy the gardens of a King. So the wisdom of the King was applauded, and men wotted he knew how to punish offences in coin, by the punishment inflicted on Khipil the builder. Before that time his affairs had languished, and the currents of business instead of flowing had become stagnant pools. It was the fashion to do as did Khipil, and fancy the tongue a constructor rather than a commentator; and there is a doom upon that people and

that man which runneth to seed in gabble, as the poet says in his wisdom :

If thou wouldst be famous, and rich in splendid fruits,
Leave to bloom the flower of things, and dig among the roots.

Truly after Khipil's punishment there were few in the dominions of Shahpesh who sought to win the honours bestowed by him on gabblers and idlers : as again the poet :

When to loquacious fools with patience rare
I listen, I have thoughts of Khipil's chair :
His bath, his nosegay, and his fount I see,—
Himself stretch'd out as a pomegranate-tree.
And that I am not Shahpesh I regret,
So to inmesh the jabblur in his net.
Well is that wisdom worthy to be sung,
Which raised the Palace of the Wagging Tongue !

And whoso is punished after the fashion of Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khipil the Builder, i. said to be one "in the Palace of the Wagging Tongue" to this time.

BASIL MURRAY

Three Pennyworth of Luck

THREE PENNYWORTH OF LUCK

IT was a singularly depressing evening ; a fog had been trying since lunch to persuade the clerks in the City that it was time to leave their stools, but by five o'clock it had tired of this sport and decided to turn into rain, and the rain was not of a sort that splashed pleasantly on the pavement and washed the soot from the roofs ; one could not say of it, " Ah ! Just what the farmers want," for it was November, and it had rained almost continuously for the last three months. Slowly, dirtily, and persistently, it was a rain that permeated one's great coat and reduced one's hat to the consistency of wet cardboard.

It struck me as I came out of my office in St. Mary Axe that I had never before seen so many hopeless faces in the street. I felt, I remember, a wave of irritation sweep over me. It seemed to me merely sordid. You must know that I had only been married to Rosemary for four months and we were both very much in love. She had been down to her sister at Byfleet for the day, and the thought of seeing her again, as I knew I should see her, in the new red hat that we had chosen together on the last day of our honeymoon filled me with a satisfaction so complete that I could think of nothing else at all.

As I walked up the long passage from the tube station to the main-line platforms at Waterloo, I kept saying to myself, " In five minutes you will see her ; in five minutes, in five minutes. . . " and if I thought for a moment of the terrible loneliness that I had known for so long before our marriage it served only to emphasise my present happiness.

When I came out into the great expanse of the station between the booking offices and the arrival platforms, I saw by the clock that it was earlier than I had thought. I had at least ten minutes to wait before the train was due.

Somehow I felt a little chilled and disappointed, but I cheered myself with the thought that the longer I waited for her the more I should enjoy her company when she came.

I sauntered across the cloak room thinking to look again at the time-tables of the Byfleet line and make sure that I had made no mistake about the time the train was due, when suddenly whom should I see standing beside the counter but George Marshall.

George and I had been friends since our first year at Oxford, when, after some club dinner, I threw a bottle at his head from a window in Balliol and nearly killed him. It is the kind of introduction that makes one never forget a man, and after he had got over it we used to see a great deal of each other one way and another. Especially as we were, both of us, born gamblers, and two or three nights every week we used to meet either in his rooms or mine and play cards, usually for sums that neither we nor any of our friends could afford.

Neither of us was remarkably lucky or unlucky, though as time went on we both became pretty good poker players and usually showed a profit on our term's play. But George was always superstitious, and as I took to gambling more and more I found I became infected with his disease.

Neither of us in our sober moments believed for a moment that by walking three times round our chairs or crossing our feet we should change the run of the cards; in fact, we rather prided ourselves on being sound rationalists who had no truck with such nonsense. But once we were sitting round the green table with the chips beside us we found, like most other gamblers, I suppose, that we had to believe in Luck, a concrete demon whom we could woo and propitiate like a chorus girl, or we should have lost all interest in the game.

When I left Oxford I gave up high play altogether. I had a job in the City which kept me busy all day and sent me home tired at night, and I found I could make money more quickly and less precariously by more conventional means. But George, who hovered somewhere on the outskirts of the Baltic Exchange, was always up to his neck in some wild speculation or other, and at week-ends he was usually to be found in the ring of whatever racecourse was holding a meeting.

I had not seen him since my marriage, and superstitions had not worried me much since I had had Rosemary to keep me company; it seemed to me that I had had about as much luck as any man could expect by finding her.

George was looking prosperous and quite cheerful. He had arranged to meet a man at seven under the clock, and, like me, had arrived a few minutes early. A drink seemed called for, and we walked along to the refreshment room and ordered a couple of whiskies. George told me that he was at last in a really big thing, something which, if it materialised, would set him up for life; I gathered it had to do with a maize crop in the Carolinas, which he was selling to a Chinese general near Shanghai.

It was to meet his partner, a fellow with an unpronounceable name, that he was waiting at Waterloo. We finished our drinks and moved out on to the platform. Outside the coloured glass windows of the refreshment room there were the usual penny-in-the-slot machines, and I managed to extract a box of matches from one of them with my last copper.

Next to it was a curious erection with a picture of a dark-haired lady with out-stretched hand pointing to "A letter from abroad awaits you," and I felt a sudden wish to make it move. I asked George for a penny and put it in the slot; round whizzed the dark-haired lady, swung once or twice to and fro, and came to rest at "You are in greater danger than you suppose. Beware in time." George, who was watching, said, "I say, that's bad."

It was too absurd, but I had a curious feeling of alarm; to believe in a gimcrack mechanical fortune-teller like this was surely the last infirmity of superstition. I laughed and said, "Oh! we'll make her take that back." George produced another penny, which I duly inserted. Again the poor thing spun madly round, but this time to return to the same place. "You are in greater danger than you suppose."

George looked at me rather queerly. "I shouldn't do it again if I were you," he said. But I was still conscious of the idiocy of the whole affair and insisted on a last shot. Something in the works needed oiling, for this time the gipsy only revolved once and stopped abruptly, as I saw at once with relief, at a new legend. I had to twist my head

round to read it, but when I did it was this : " Be warned ! Your friend is false to you ! "

George had already moved away, and I hurried after him. I was seriously disturbed ; all my old superstitiousness came flooding back. If I had thought for a moment I should have realised the folly of the whole business, but I seemed unable to think ; I could not escape from the conviction that for some reason or other I was in for some frightful piece of bad luck. I must have looked pretty gloomy when I caught him up. But he did nothing to console me, for he saw his partner waiting over at the other side of the station, and he seemed anxious to be off.

We said good-bye, and I wandered across to No. 9 platform, where the Byfleet train was posted to arrive. It was five minutes past seven as I bought my platform ticket, and the train was due in two minutes. The platform was almost empty—three or four porters, an old woman with a gamp, who looked as if she had come to meet a nephew from school, and a smartly dressed Jew in a top hat, who was smoking a large cigar and talking to himself. I think he was drunk and had no business to be there at all.

I walked right along the platform to the far end and looked out along the line ; it was an even more wretched evening than I had realised ; the gathering darkness, the rain, and the wisps of fog that still lingered on the line, combined to depress my spirits still further. I fancied that the red lights of the signals were repeating that foolish phrase—" Beware : you are in greater danger than you suppose ! " I don't know how long I stood brooding out there, but when I turned back towards the station my coat was dripping wet, and as I caught sight of the clock I saw it was already twenty minutes past the hour.

The train was late. In the mood I was I could not help but be worried. Then for the first time my fear became distinct—specialised. Suppose the danger was to Rosemary, suppose something had happened which would prevent her ever coming ! The thought was so terrible to me that I think I must have groaned, for I noticed a porter eyeing me curiously. I moved on towards the barrier and with each step that fear grew more distinct.

By the time I reached the gate I was convinced that Rosemary was dead, and dead in the most horrible way. Th

ticket collector was in a bad temper. The train was late. That was all he knew or cared: no, there had been no news of an accident. I went back and sat on a seat against the railings at the side of the platform. I felt very cold and terribly alone.

When the train did finally arrive I was at first too dazed to realise it; then, with the suddenness of all violent emotion. I reacted back to my early cheerfulness. I laughed out loud and ran across the platform to intercept the thin stream of passengers at the gate. Cold, angry, fat, thin, male and female, the Noah's Ark family filed past. There were not very many of them and again the platform was empty; now even the porters and the Jew had gone.

And Rosemary had not come. It took a long time to dawn on me. My relief that there had, after all, been no accident was so enormous that the possibility of other misfortunes had vanished from my mind. But now I recalled the second prophecy of that infernal machine—"Your friend is false to you!" Rosemary, whom I had loved as no woman had ever been loved before, was false to me! Incredible suspicions filled my mind. I remembered an old tale that I had heard of how Desmond, her sister's husband, had really been in love with her. The journey to Byfleet was a blind that any divorce lawyer would have seen through in a moment. She had meant to leave me; she had planned it coldly and deliberately; she had never really cared. . . . Something seemed to break in my brain, and I ran straight across the platform and stumbled on to the line.

When I came to myself I was in bed at home and Rosemary was holding my hand. It was late the same evening, and I had a racking headache and a very stiff shoulder. I had, it seemed, fallen on to the empty line, and, fortunately, a porter passing on the opposite platform had seen me and picked me up. I had a driving licence in my pocket, and the ambulance took me straight home, where Rosemary had arrived an hour earlier, having been motored up from Byfleet because of the lateness of the trains. And so far as I am concerned that was the end of the story.

But there is one more thing to tell. Next day when I opened my evening paper I read in the stop press news of

the suicide of a well-known business man whose partner had swindled him and left him to face bankruptcy, and perhaps criminal proceedings, alone.

His name was George Marshall; his business something to do with maize in South Carolina; and suddenly it dawned on me that the warning of the dark-haired lady had been given to him, *for it was his pennies that I had used!*

L. C. S. ABSON

An Experiment with Blood

AN EXPERIMENT WITH BLOOD

OF course, it is possible that he was a little mad. . . .
But I will tell you the story.

We were sitting, this strange old man and I, outside a little old inn near Cannes, on the top of a cliff overlooking a view of enchanting beauty. There was a particularly fine sunset over the Esterels. From a professional point of view, I considered the effect sufficiently remarkable to justify the perilous procedure of addressing a stranger. But he was English, I knew, as I had heard him question the innkeeper a few minutes before. So, without turning towards him, I murmured, "A fine colour-effect, is it not?—almost like a great smear of blood across the sky"—a remark which, directly I had made it, I regretted as disgustingly emotional in cold speech and to a stranger.

Out of the corner of my eye I was surprised to see the stranger stiffen, as if I had said a thing which startled him.

"Blood?" he said in a low voice. "Blood? Oh! Yes, indeed, Blood!" He laughed in a high-pitched, nervous giggle. Then, turning to me with a serious face, he said:

"You will pardon me, but blood is a thing which I never like to hear mentioned. Besides, I had been thinking——"

This was astonishing! Here was something unusual for a chance conversation; but I expressed mild surprise.

"I may claim," he continued, "to know a great deal about blood—more, in fact, than any other man alive! I once made an experiment with blood."

He glanced at me again as if to see what effect his words had made. I was still mildly surprised. He laughed his rather disagreeable little laugh.

I was more astonished than I had allowed my face to show. I took to examining him as he sat gazing straight in front of him at the great red sun setting gradually lower in a crimson sky. He was extremely thin, almost emaciated, and must

have been at least sixty-five. His face was clean-shaven, and so dead-white in appearance, in spite of the pale reflection now spreading over everything, that the disturbing fancy came to me that this experiment of which he spoke had been made upon his own person, and in some way had drained his own face of blood. His eyes were pale and protruded slightly; the hair below his hat was white. He seemed uniformly without colour. His thin hands grasped the head of a knobbed stick. Somehow—it may have been his pallidness—I found him vaguely unpleasant.

He was insistent.

“A discovery—with blood,” he repeated. “Two discoveries, to be precise. I will tell you of the first. Or possibly——?”

He turned a questioning gaze on me with those quick, protuberant eyes, now glowing distressingly red with the sun. I assured him that my time was to spare, and that I was there merely to enjoy the summer evening.

“Enjoy?” He smiled. “Yes, it is possible you may enjoy my story. But in any case I owe it to you as an explanation.

“You must know then, that I am a doctor. Or, rather, I was a doctor. I had a practice in England—in Surrey. I have not practised for many years.

“I was a clever young man as a student—there is no call for me to be modest; I am old now. I was brilliant, and I worked hard. I was especially fascinated by the study of the blood, and hæmatic research occupied all the time I could spare from the normal curriculum.

“It was while I was still at college, in my final year, that I married. Young men are often foolish, especially brilliant young men. My bride was younger and more foolish even than I. She was barely nineteen. But we were old in other things. I was twenty-six. We married hastily—you understand me, sir?”

He seemed unnecessarily insistent over this dubious episode, and while he gave another unpleasant laugh, he threw me a knowing little glance, as if to make quite sure that I had grasped his meaning. I began to wish I had not been so ready an audience to such confessions. My vague dislike now became more actual. He looked positively red in the last remaining light. I suppose I did, too.

“It was fortunate that I had money. What promised to be

a brilliant career would otherwise have had a very poor start. As in most marriages, romance died very young. I was absorbed in my work. I passed out of my college with a result as excellent as had been anticipated, and it seemed that Fortune gave me all her encouragement, for I found myself with the means to purchase a small yet profitable practice in Surrey, which gave me excellent opportunities of pursuing my own researches. To these I gave my fullest energies.

"A child was born six months after our marriage, and my wife was contented enough. Beyond the obvious pleasure she derived from the prospect of being one day the wife of a famous man, as I would tell her, she took no interest in my activities, and as to their nature she had but the vaguest notions.

"My researches were gratifying. I contributed papers to the 'British Medical Journal.' Some of them, in which I dealt with the properties of hematokonia, brought me recognition from more than one important research body.

"It was upon this element, of which then very little was known, that I based my darling theory, a theory which gave promise of a discovery that would make my name. Gradually I saw it growing from a theory to a fact which could be proved and demonstrated, and I saw myself a famous man. I was ambitious and was as elated at the growing certainty of success as a young man should be.

"I will not weary a layman with the scientific details of my discovery. They are many and complicated. You *are* a layman?"

I nodded assent—"in fact, a painter."

"Ah! then that explains your observation on the—er—unpleasant appearance of the sky to-night."

He was silent for two or three minutes, and I began to fear that he had thought better of imparting the secret—if there was a secret—to a complete stranger. Then, as if in answer, he went on: "The secret of that discovery is mine still, and will be mine when I die." He paused another moment, and then resumed in a new and more lively tone:

"My theory, then, was this: that a definite similarity occurs in the make-up of the blood of near relations—in that constituent of which I spoke; that there is an actual and

positive likeness under certain conditions in the blood of a parent and his direct issue.

"I worked on and experimented unceasingly: on whole families of cats and dogs and rats and pigs, and on their dams and sires. I proved beyond doubt that I could show my theory to the world as a definite fact at last.

"Do you realise, sir, the significance of that discovery of mine?" He waxed enthusiastic. "Do you realise that the very fact of an indisputable and infallible proof of blood-relationship in human beings was a gigantic step forward that would benefit, not only the world of science, but the whole of the civilised world? For purposes of police investigation alone my revelation was as boundless in its possibilities as the revelation of the fingerprint.

"I was nearing the end. My only real difficulty, during the later stages of my investigations, was a method of performing the actual test with perfect safety to the subject. An injection had to be made under whose influence the constituents of the blood underwent a temporary chemical change. The effect of this change during my earlier experiments had proved too often harmful—sometimes even fatal. I thought I had found the means whereby the test could be made with perfect safety—I *knew* I had found the means! The final proving test was to be upon my son—then a delicate child of just a year—and myself. Without his mother's knowledge I gave him the injection." He was silent. Then, almost to himself: "Oh, I was mad—mad to do it!"

I said nothing for a minute. I had been wrong about this strange old man. Here was tragedy indeed. I glanced across at him. His features seemed to me to wear a softer look. What suffering must have been his lot since that terrible experiment so many years ago!

"I think I can guess your tragedy," I said softly. "It is terrible. I can only regret that unwittingly I have brought your mind back to such suffering. I offer you my apology for causing you pain, and my sympathy."

The last of the sun had now slipped away from sight, and nothing but a few streaks of fading red remained. It was growing chilly, too, and I shifted as if to go. I had said the most I could.

He seemed to awaken from a doze.

"Sympathy?—sympathy?" he murmured.

"Why, yes, indeed," I replied. "The experiment—the injection—it killed your child! After so tragic a mischance I can understand—several things."

He rose from his seat.

"You misunderstand me. My test could not go wrong. The experiment did not kill the child. Would to God it had! You see, I had just made my second great discovery. . . .! I was distraught. . . .!

"There is no more blood left in the sky for you to admire. Good-night to you!"

CHARLES DICKENS

No. 1 Branch Line : The Signaller

NO. 1 BRANCH LINE: THE SIGNALMAN

“HALLOA! Below there!”

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but, instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said, for my life, what. But, I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice.

“Hallos! Below!”

From looking down the Line, he turned himself about again, and, raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

“Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?”

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then, there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down. When such vapour as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again, and saw him re-furling the flag he had shown while the train went by.

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag towards a point on my level, some two or three hundred yards distant. I called down to him, “All right!” and made for that point. There, by dint of looking closely about me, I found a rough zig-zag descending path.

The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone that became oozier and wetter as I went down.

When I came down low enough upon the zig-zag descent to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude as if he were waiting for me to appear.

I resumed my downward way, and, stepping out upon the level of the railroad and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way, only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction, terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air.

Before he stirred, I was near enough to him to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step, and lifted his hand.

This was a lonesome post to occupy (I said), and it had riveted my attention when I looked down from up yonder. A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose; not an unwelcome rarity, I hoped? In me, he merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly-awakened interest in these great works.

He directed a most curious look towards the red light near the tunnel's mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked at me.

That light was part of his charge? Was it not?

He answered in a low voice: "Don't you know it is?"

The monstrous thought came into my mind as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face that this was a spirit, not a man.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

"You look at me," I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me."

"I was doubtful," he returned, "whether I had seen you before."

"Where?"

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

"There?" I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), "Yes."

"My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear."

"I think I may," he rejoined. "Yes. I am sure I may."

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words. Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work—manual labour—he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it.

Was it necessary for him when on duty always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from between these high stone walls? Why, that depended upon times and circumstances. Under some conditions there would be less upon the line than under others, and the same held good as to certain hours of the day and night. In bright weather, he did choose occasions for getting a little above these lower shadows; but, being at all times liable to be called by his electric bell, and at such times listening for it with redoubled anxiety, the relief was less than I would suppose.

He took me into his box, where there was a fire, a desk for an official book in which he had to make certain entries, a telegraphic instrument with its dial face and needles, and the little bell of which he had spoken.

He had been, when young (if I could believe it, sitting in that hut; he scarcely could), a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down and never risen again. He had no complaint to offer about that.

In the discharge of his duties I observed him to be re-

markably exact and vigilant, breaking off his discourse at a syllable, and remaining silent until what he had to do was done.

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did *not* ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

Said I when I rose to leave him: "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."

"I believe I used to be so," he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; "but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled."

"It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very difficult to speak of. If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you."

"But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?"

"I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten to-morrow night, sir."

"I will come at eleven."

He thanked me, and went out at the door with me. "I'll show my white light, sir," he said, in his peculiar low voice, "till you have found the way up. When you have found it, don't call out! And when you are at the top, don't call out!"

His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than "Very well."

"And when you come down to-morrow night don't call out! Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry 'Halloa! Below there!' to-night?"

"Heaven knows," said I. "I cried something to that effect——"

"Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well."

"I admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below."

"For no other reason?"

"What other reason could I possibly have?"

"You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?"

"No."

He wished me good-night, and held up his light. I walked by the side of the down line of rails (with a very disagreeable sensation of a train coming behind me), until I found the path. I got back to my inn without any adventure.

Punctual to my appointment, I placed my foot on the first notch of the zig-zag next night, as the distant clocks were striking eleven. He was waiting for me at the bottom, with his white light on. "I have not called out," I said, when we came close together; "may I speak now?" "By all means, sir," "Good-night then, and here's my hand." "Good-night, sir, and here's mine." With that we walked side by side to his box, entered it, closed the door, and sat down by the fire.

"I have made up my mind, sir," he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, "that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for someone else yesterday evening. That troubles me."

"That mistake?"

"No. That someone else."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Like me?"

"I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face and the right arm is waved. Violently waved. This way."

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating with the utmost passion and vehemence: "For God's sake, clear the way!"

"One moonlight night," said the man, "I was sitting here, when I heard a voice cry 'Halloa! Below there!' I started up, looked from that door, and saw this someone else standing by the red light near the tunnel, waving as I just now showed you. The voice seemed hoarse with shouting, and it cried, 'Look out! Look out!' And then again 'Halloa! Below there! Look out!' I caught up my lamp, turned it on red, and ran towards the figure calling

'What's wrong? What has happened? Where?' It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel. I advanced so close upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran right up to it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away when it was gone."

"Into the tunnel," said I.

"No. I ran on into the tunnel, five hundred yards. I stopped and held my lamp above my head and saw the figures of the measured distance, and saw the wet stains stealing down the walls and trickling through the arch. I ran out again, faster than I had run in (for I had a mortal abhorrence of the place upon me), and I looked all round the red light with my own red light and I went up the iron ladder to the gallery atop of it, and I came down again, and ran back here. I telegraphed both ways: 'An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?' The answer came back, both ways: 'All Well.'"

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight, and how that figures, originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves.

That was all very well, he returned, after we had sat listening for a while. But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm:

"Within six hours after the Appearance the memorable accident on this Line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood."

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But, it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken into account in dealing with such a subject.

"This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, "was just a year ago. Six or seven months passed, and I had recovered

from the surprise and shock, when one morning, as the day was breaking, I, standing at that door, looked towards the red light, and saw the spectre again." He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

"Did it cry out?"

"No. It was silent."

"Did it wave its arm?"

"No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this."

Once more, I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning.

"Did you go up to it?"

"I came in and sat down, partly to collect my thoughts, partly because it had turned me faint. When I went to the door again, daylight was above me, and the ghost was gone."

"But nothing followed? Nothing came of this?"

He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice, giving a ghastly nod each time:

"That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed at a carriage window on my side what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it, just in time to signal the driver Stop! He shut off, and put his brake on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and, as I went along, heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here and laid down on this floor between us."

He resumed. "Now, sir, mark this, and judge how my mind is troubled. The spectre came back, a week ago. Ever since it has been there, now and again, by fits and starts."

"At the light?"

"At the Danger-light."

"What does it seem to do?"

He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of "For God's sake, clear the way!"

Then he went on. "I have no peace or rest for it. It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonised manner, 'Below there! Look out! Look out!' It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell——"

I caught at that. "Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here and you went to the door?"

"Twice."

"Why, see," said I, "how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man it did *not* ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you."

He shook his head. "I have never made a mistake as to that yet, sir. I have never confused the spectre's ring with the man's. The ghost's ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don't wonder that you failed to hear it. But *I* heard it."

"And did the spectre seem to be there when you looked out?"

"It *was* there."

"Both times?"

He repeated firmly: "Both times."

"Will you come to the door with me and look for it now?"

He bit his under-lip as though he were somewhat unwilling, but arose. I opened the door and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway.

"Do you see it?" I asked him, taking particular note of his face. His eyes were prominent and strained; but not very much more so, perhaps, than my own had been when I had directed them earnestly towards the same spot.

"No," he answered. "It is not there."

"Agreed," said I.

We went in again, shut the door, and resumed our seats.

"By this time you will fully understand, sir," he said, "that what troubles me so dreadfully is the question, What does the spectre mean?"

"What is its warning against?" he said, ruminating, with his eyes on the fire, and only by times turning them on me. "What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging, somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of *me*. What can I do?"

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the drops from his heated forehead.

"If I telegraphed Danger on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it," he went on, wiping the palms of his hands. "I should get into trouble, and do no good. They would think I was mad. This is the way it would work:—Message: 'Danger! Take care!' Answer: 'What Danger? Where?' Message: 'Don't know. But for God's sake take care!' They would displace me. What else could they do?"

His pain of mind was most pitiable to see.

"When it first stood under the Danger-light," he went on, putting his dark hair back from his head, and drawing his hands outward across and across his temples in an extremity of feverish distress, "why not tell me where that accident was to happen—if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted—if it could have been averted? When on its second coming it hid its face, why not tell me instead: 'She is going to die. Let them keep her at home'? If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signalman on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act!"

When I saw him in this state I saw that for the poor man's sake, as well as for the public safety, what I had to do for the time was to compose his mind. Therefore, setting aside all question of reality or unreality between us, I represented to him that whoever thoroughly discharged his duty must do well, and that at least it was his comfort that he understood his duty, though he did not understand these confounding Appearances. In this effort I succeeded far better than in the attempt to reason him out of his conviction. He became calm; the occupations incidental to his post as the night advanced began to make larger demands on his attention; and I left him at two in the morning.

That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it I see no reason to conceal.

But, what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant,

painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind?

Unable to overcome a feeling that there would be something treacherous in my communicating what he had told me to his superiors in the company, without first being plain with himself and proposing a middle course to him, I ultimately resolved to offer to accompany him (otherwise keeping his secret for the present) to the wisest medical practitioner we could hear of in those parts, and to take his opinion. A change in his time of duty would come round next night, he had apprised me, and he would be off an hour or two after sunrise, and on again soon after sunset. I had appointed to return accordingly.

Next evening was a lovely evening, and I walked out early to enjoy it. The sun was not yet quite down when I traversed the field-path near the top of the deep cutting. I would extend my walk for an hour, I said to myself.

Before pursuing my stroll I stepped to the brink and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made. The Danger-light was not yet lighted. Against its shaft, a little low hut, entirely new to me, had been made of some wooden supports and tarpaulin. It looked no bigger than a bed.

With an irresistible sense that something was wrong—with a flashing self-reproachful fear that fatal mischief had come of my leaving the man there, and causing no one to be sent to overlook or correct what he did—I descended the notched path with all the speed I could make.

"What is the matter?" I asked the men.

"Signalman killed this morning, sir."

"Not the man belonging to that box?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not the man I know?"

"You will recognise him, sir, if you knew him," said the

man who spoke for the others, solemnly uncovering his own head and raising an end of the tarpaulin, "for his face is quite composed."

"O! how did this happen, how did this happen?" I asked, turning from one to another as the hut closed in again.

"He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better. But somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light, and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel, his back was towards her, and she cut him down. That man drove her and was showing how it happened. Show the gentleman, Tom."

The man, who wore a rough dark dress, stepped back to his former place at the mouth of the tunnel:

"Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir," he said, "I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn't seem to take heed of the whistle I shut it off when we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could call."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!'"

I started.

"Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir; I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes, not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use."

FRANK R. STOCKTON

The Lady, or The Tiger?

THE LADY, OR THE TIGER ?

IN the very olden time there lived a semi-barbaric king whose ideas, though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbours, were still large, florid and untrammelled, as became the half of him which was barbaric. He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing ; and, when he and himself agreed upon anything, the thing was done. When every member of his domestic and political systems moved smoothly in its appointed course, his nature was bland and genial ; but whenever there was a little hitch, and some of his orbs got out of their orbits, he was blander and more genial still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight and crush down uneven places.

Among the borrowed notions by which his barbarism had become semified was that of the public arena, in which, by exhibitions of manly and beastly valour, the minds of his subjects were refined and cultured.

But even here the exuberant and barbaric fancy asserted itself. The arena of the king was built, not to give the people an opportunity of hearing the rhapsodies of dying gladiators, nor to enable them to view the inevitable conclusion of a conflict between religious opinions and hungry jaws, but for purposes far better adapted to widen and develop the mental energies of the people. This vast amphitheatre, with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vault, and its unseen passages, was an agent of poetic justice, in which crime was punished, or virtue rewarded, by the decrees of an impartial and incorruptible chance.

When a subject was accused of a crime of sufficient importance to interest the king, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused person would be

decided in the king's arena—a structure which well deserved its name; for, although its form and plan were borrowed from afar, its purpose emanated solely from the brain of this man, who, every barleycorn a king, knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy, and who ingrafted on every adopted form of human thought and action the rich growth of his barbaric idealism.

When all the people had assembled in the galleries, and the king, surrounded by his court, sat high upon his throne of royal state on one side of the arena, he gave a signal, a door beneath him opened, and the accused subject stepped out into the amphitheatre. Directly opposite him, on the other side of the enclosed space, were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. It was the duty and the privilege of the person on trial to walk directly to these doors and open one of them. He could open either door he pleased: he was subject to no guidance or influence but that of the aforementioned impartial and incorruptible chance. If he opened the one, there came out of it a hungry tiger, the fiercest and most cruel that could be procured, which immediately sprang upon him and tore him to pieces, as a punishment for his guilt. The moment that the case of the criminal was thus decided doleful iron bells were clanged, great wails went up from the hired mourners posted on the outer rim of the arena, and the vast audience, with bowed heads and downcast hearts, wended slowly their homeward way, mourning greatly that one so young and fair, or so old and respected, should have merited so dire a fate.

But, if the accused person opened the other door, there came forth from it a lady, the most suitable to his years and station that his majesty could select among his fair subjects; and to this lady he was immediately married, as a reward of his innocence. It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection; the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward. The exercises, as in the other instance, took place immediately, and in the arena. Another door opened beneath the king, and a priest, followed by a band of choristers, and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns and treading an epithalamic measure, advanced to where the pair stood, side by side; and the

wedding was promptly and cheerily solemnised. Then the gay brass bells rang forth their merry peals, the people shouted glad hurrahs, and the innocent man, preceded by children strewing flowers on his path, led his bride to his home.

This was the king's semi-barbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady : he opened either he pleased, without having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of one door, and on some out of the other. The decisions of this tribunal were not only fair, they were positively determinate : the accused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty ; and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot, whether he liked it or not. There was no escape from the judgments of the king's arena.

The institution was a very popular one. When the people gathered together on one of the great trial days, they never knew whether they were to witness a bloody slaughter or a hilarious wedding. This element of uncertainty lent an interest to the occasion which it could not otherwise have attained. Thus the masses were entertained and pleased, and the thinking part of the community could bring no charge of unfairness against this plan ; for did not the accused person have the whole matter in his own hands ?

The semi-barbaric king had a daughter as blooming as his most florid fancies, and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own. As is usual in such cases, she was the apple of his eye, and was loved by him above all humanity. Among his courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens.

This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom ; and she loved him with an ardour that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong. This love affair moved on happily for many months, until one day the king happened to discover its existence. He did not hesitate nor waver in regard to his duty in the premises. The youth was immediately cast into prison, and a day was appointed for his trial in the king's arena. This, of

course, was an especially important occasion ; and his majesty as well as all the people, was greatly interested in the workings and development of this trial. Never before had such a case occurred ; never before had a subject dared to love the daughter of a king. In after years such things became commonplace enough ; but then they were, in no slight degree, novel and startling.

The tiger-cages of the kingdom were searched for the most savage and relentless beasts, from which the fiercest monster might be selected for the arena ; and the ranks of maiden youth and beauty throughout the land were carefully surveyed by competent judges, in order that the young man might have a fitting bride in case fate did not determine for him a different destiny.

Of course, everybody knew that the deed with which the accused was charged had been done. He had loved the princess, and neither he, she, or any one else thought of denying the fact ; but the king would not think of allowing any fact of this kind to interfere with the workings of the tribunal in which he took such great delight and satisfaction. No matter how the affair turned out, the youth would be disposed of ; and the king would take an æsthetic pleasure in watching the course of events, which would determine whether or not the young man had done wrong in allowing himself to love the princess.

The appointed day arrived. From far and near the people gathered, and thronged the great galleries of the arena ; and crowds, unable to gain admittance, massed themselves against its outside walls. The king and his court were in their places, opposite the twin doors, those fateful portals, so terrible in their similarity.

All was ready. The signal was given. A door beneath the royal party opened, and the lover of the princess walked into the arena. Tall, beautiful, fair, his appearance was greeted with a low hum of admiration and anxiety. Half the audience had not known so grand a youth had lived among them. No wonder the princess loved him ! What a terrible thing for him to be there !

As the youth advanced into the arena he turned, as the custom was, to bow to the king ; but he did not think at all of that royal personage ; his eyes were fixed upon the princess, who sat to the right of her father. Had it not been

for the moiety of barbarism in her nature it is probable that lady would not have been there ; but her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent on an occasion in which she was so terribly interested. From the moment that the decree had gone forth that her lover should decide his fate in the king's arena she had thought of nothing, night or day, but this great event and the various subjects connected with it. Possessed of more power, influence and force of character than anyone who had ever before been interested in such a case, she had done what no other person had done—she had possessed herself the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the two rooms that lay behind those doors stood the cage of the tiger, with its open front, and in which waited the lady. Through these thick doors, heavily curtained with skins on the inside, it was impossible that any noise or suggestion should come from within to the person who should approach to raise the latch of one of them ; but gold, and the power of a woman's will, had brought the secret to the princess.

And not only did she know in which room stood the lady ready to emerge, all blushing and radiant, should her door be opened, but she knew who the lady was. It was one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court who had been selected as the reward of the accused youth should he be proved innocent of the crime of aspiring to one so far above him ; and the princess hated her. Often had she seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration upon the person of her lover, and sometimes she thought these glances were perceived and even returned. Now and then she had seen them talking together ; it was but for a moment of two, but much can be said in a brief space ; it may have been on most unimportant topics, but how could she know that ? The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess ; and, with all the intensity of the savage blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door.

When her lover turned and looked at her, and his eye met hers as she sat there, paler and whiter than any one in the vast ocean of anxious faces about her, he saw, by that power of quick perception which is given to those whose

souls are one, that she knew behind which door crouched the tiger, and behind which stood the lady. He had expected her to know it. He understood her nature, and his soul was assured that she would never rest until she had made plain to herself this thing, hidden to all other lookers-on, even to the king. The only hope for the youth in which there was any element of certainty was based upon the success of the princess in discovering this mystery ; and the moment he looked upon her he saw she had succeeded, as in his soul he knew she would succeed.

Then it was that his quick and anxious glance asked the question : " Which ? " It was as plain to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash ; it must be answered in another.

Her right arm lay on the cushioned parapet before her. She raised her hand and made a slight, quick movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was fixed on the man in the arena. He turned and, with a firm and rapid step, he walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was fixed immovably upon that man. Without the slightest hesitation he went to the door on the right and opened it.

Now, the point of the story is this : Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady ? The more we reflect upon this question the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way. Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him ?

How often, in her waking hours and in her dreams, had she started in wild horror, and covered her face with her hands as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side of which waited the cruel fangs of the tiger !

But how much oftener had she seen him at the other door ! How, in her grievous reveries, had she gnashed her teeth, and torn her hair, when she saw his start of rapturous delight as he opened the door of the lady !

How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen

him rush to meet that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph ; when she had seen him lead her forth, his whole frame kindled with the joy of recovered life ; when she had heard the glad shouts from the multitude, and the wild ringing of the happy bells ; when she had seen the priest, with his joyous followers, advance to the couple and make them man and wife before her very eyes ; and when she had seen them walk away together upon their path of flowers, followed by the tremendous shouts of the hilarious multitude, in which her one despairing shriek was lost and drowned !

Would it not be better for him to die at once, and go to wait for her in the blessed regions of semi-barbaric futurity ?

And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood !

Her decision had been indicated in an instant, but it had been made after days and nights of anguished deliberation. She had known she would be asked, she had decided what she would answer, and, without the slightest hesitation, she had moved her hand to the right.

The question of her decision is one not be lightly considered, and it is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer it. And so I leave it with all of you : Which came out of the opened door—the lady, or the tiger ?

AMBROSE BIERCE

A Horseman in the Sky

A HORSEMAN IN THE SKY

ONE sunny afternoon in the autumn of the year 1861, a soldier lay in a clump of laurel by the side of a road in Western Virginia. He lay at full length, upon his stomach, his feet resting upon the toes, his head upon the left forearm. His extended right hand loosely grasped his rifle. But for the somewhat methodical disposition of his limbs and a slight rhythmic movement of the cartridge box at the back of his belt, he might have been thought to be dead. He was asleep at his post of duty. But if detected he would be dead shortly afterward, that being the just and legal penalty of his crime.

The clump of laurel in which the criminal lay was in the angle of the road which, after ascending, southward, a steep acclivity to that point, turned sharply to the west, running along the summit for perhaps one hundred yards. There it turned southward again and went zigzagging downward through the forest. At the salient of that second angle was a large flat rock, jutting out from the ridge to the northward, overlooking the deep valley from which the road ascended. The rock capped a high cliff; a stone dropped from its outer edge would have fallen sheer downward one thousand feet to the top of the pines. The angle where the soldier lay was on another spur of the same cliff. Had he been awake he would have commanded a view, not only of the short arm of the road and the jutting rock but of the entire profile of the cliff below it. It might well have made him giddy to look.

The country was wooded everywhere except at the bottom of the valley to the northward, where there was a small natural meadow, through which flowed a stream scarcely visible from the valley's rim. This open ground looked hardly larger than an ordinary dooryard, but was really several acres in extent. Its green was more vivid than that of the enclosing forest. Away beyond it rose a line of giant cliffs similar to those upon which we are supposed to stand in our survey of the savage scene, and through which the

road had somehow made its climb to the summit. The configuration of the valley, indeed, was such that from our point of observation it seemed entirely shut in, and one could not but have wondered how the road which found a way out of it had found a way into it.

No country is so wild and difficult but men will make it a theatre of war; concealed in the forest at the bottom of that military rat-trap, in which half a hundred men in possession of the exits might have starved an army to submission, lay five regiments of Federal infantry. They had marched all the previous day and night and were resting. At nightfall they would take to the road again, climb to the place where their unfaithful sentry now slept, and, descending the other slope of the ridge, fall upon a camp of the enemy at about midnight. Their hope was to surprise it, for the road led to the rear of it. In case of failure their position would be perilous in the extreme; and fail they surely would should accident or vigilance apprise the enemy of the movement.

The sleeping sentinel in the clump of laurel was a young Virginian named Carter Druse. He was the son of wealthy parents, an only child, and had known such ease and cultivation and high living as wealth and taste were able to command in the mountain country of Western Virginia. His home was but a few miles from where he now lay. One morning he had risen from the breakfast table and said, quietly and gravely: "Father, a Union regiment has arrived at Grafton, I am going to join it."

The father lifted his leonine head, looked at the son a moment in silence, and replied: "Go, Carter, and, whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty. Virginia, to which you are a traitor, must get on without you. Should we both live to the end of the war, we will speak further of the matter. Your mother, as the physician has informed you, is in a most critical condition; at the best she cannot be with us longer than a few weeks, but that time is precious. It would be better not to disturb her."

So, Carter Druse, bowing reverently to his father, who returned the salute with a stately courtesy which masked a breaking heart, left the home of his childhood to go soldiering. By conscience and courage, by deeds of devotion and daring, he soon commended himself to his fellows and his officers; and it was to these qualities and to some knowledge of the

country that he owed his selection for his present perilous duty at the extreme outpost. Nevertheless, fatigue had been stronger than resolution and he had fallen asleep. What good or bad angel came in a dream to rouse him from his state of crime who shall say? Without a movement, without a sound, in the profound silence and the languor of the late afternoon, some invisible messenger of fate touched with unsealing finger the eyes of his consciousness—whispered into the ear of his spirit the mysterious awakening word which no human lips have ever spoken, no human memory has ever recalled. He quietly raised his forehead from his arm and looked between the masking stems of the laurels, instinctively closing his right hand about the stock of his rifle.

His first feeling was a keen artistic delight. On a colossal pedestal, the cliff, motionless at the extreme edge of the capping rock and sharply outlined against the sky, was an equestrian statue of impressive dignity. The figure of the man sat the figure of the horse, straight and soldierly, but with the repose of a Grecian god carved in the marble which limits the suggestion of activity. The grey costume harmonised with its aerial background; the metal of accoutrement and caparison was softened and subdued by the shadow; the animal's skin had no points of high light. A carbine, strikingly foreshortened, lay across the pommel of the saddle, kept in place by the right hand grasping it at the "grip"; the left hand, holding the bridle rein, was invisible. In silhouette against the sky, the profile of the horse was cut with the sharpness of a cameo; it looked across the heights of air to the confronting cliffs beyond. The face of the rider, turned slightly to the left, showed only an outline of temple and beard; he was looking downward to the bottom of the valley. Magnified by its lift against the sky and by the soldier's testifying sense of the formidableness of a near enemy, the group appeared of heroic, almost colossal, size.

For an instant Druse had a strange, half-defined feeling that he had slept to the end of the war and was looking upon a noble work of art reared upon that commanding eminence to commemorate the deeds of an heroic past of which he had been an inglorious part. The feeling was dispelled by a slight movement of the group; the horse, without moving its feet, had drawn its body slightly backward from the verge; the man remained immobile as before. Broad awake and

keenly alive to the significance of the situation, Druse now brought the butt of his rifle against his cheek by cautiously pushing the barrel forward through the bushes, cocked the piece, and, glancing through the sights, covered a vital spot of the horseman's breast. A touch upon the trigger and all would have been well with Carter Druse. At that instant the horseman turned his head and looked in the direction of his concealed foreman—seemed to look into his very face, into his eyes, into his brave compassionate heart.

Is it, then, so terrible to kill an enemy in war—an enemy who has surprised a secret vital to the safety of oneself and comrades—an enemy more formidable for his knowledge than all his army for its numbers?

Carter Druse grew deathly pale; he shook in every limb, turned faint, and saw the statuesque group before him as black figures, rising, falling, moving unsteadily in arcs of circles in a fiery sky. His hand fell away from his weapon, his head slowly dropped until his face rested on the leaves in which he lay. This courageous gentleman and hardy soldier was near swooning from intensity of emotion.

It was not for long: in another moment his face was raised from earth, his hands resumed their places on the rifle, his forefinger sought the trigger; mind, heart and eyes were clear, conscience and reason sound. He could not hope to capture that enemy; to alarm him would but send him dashing to his camp with his fatal news. The duty of the soldier was plain; the man must be shot dead from ambush—without warning, without a moment's spiritual preparation, with never so much as an unspoken prayer, he must be sent to his account.

But no—there is a hope; he may have discovered nothing—perhaps he is but admiring the sublimity of the landscape. If permitted, he may turn and ride carelessly away in the direction whence he came. Surely it will be possible to judge at the instant of his withdrawing whether he knows. It may well be that his fixity of attention—Druse turned his head and looked below, through the deeps of air downward, as from the surface to the bottom of a translucent sea. He saw creeping across the green meadow a sinuous line of figures of men and horses—some foolish commander was permitting the soldiers of his escort to water their beasts in the open, in plain view from a hundred summits!

Druse withdrew his eyes from the valley and fixed them again upon the group of man and horse in the sky, and again it was through the sights of his rifle. But this time his aim was at the horse. In his memory, as if they were a divine mandate, rang the words of his father at their parting: "Whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty." He was calm now. His teeth were firmly but not rigidly closed; his nerves were as tranquil as a sleeping babe's—not a tremor affected any muscle of his body; his breathing, until suspended in the act of taking aim, was regular and slow. Duty had conquered; the spirit had said to the body: "Peace, be still." He fired.

At that moment an officer of the Federal force, who, in a spirit of adventure or in quest of knowledge, had left the hidden bivouac in the valley, and, with aimless feet, had made his way to the lower edge of a small open space near the foot of the cliff, was considering what he had to gain by pushing his exploration farther. At a distance of a quarter-mile before him, but apparently at a stone's throw, rose from its fringe of pines the gigantic face of rock, towering to so great a height above him that it made him giddy to look up to where its edge cut a sharp, rugged line against the sky. At some distance away to his right it presented a clean, vertical profile against a background of blue sky to a point half of the way down, and of distant hills hardly less blue, thence to the tops of the trees at its base. Lifting his eyes to the dizzy altitude of its summit, the officer saw an astonishing sight—a man on horseback riding down into the valley through the air!

Straight upright sat the rider, in military fashion, with a firm seat in the saddle, a strong clutch upon the rein to hold his charger from too impetuous a plunge. From his bare head his long hair streamed upward, waving like a plume. His right hand was concealed in the cloud of the horse's lifted mane. The animal's body was as level as if every hoof-stroke encountered the resistant earth. Its motions were those of a wild gallop, but even as the officer looked they ceased, with all the legs thrown sharply forward as in the act of alighting from a leap. But this was a flight!

Filled with amazement and terror by this apparition of a horseman in the sky—half believing himself the chosen scribe of some new Apocalypse—the officer was overcome by the

immensity of his emotions ; his legs failed him and he fell. Almost at the same instant he heard a crashing sound in the trees—a sound that died without an echo—and all was still.

The officer rose to his feet, trembling. The familiar sensation of an abraded shin recalled his dazed faculties. Pulling himself together, he ran rapidly obliquely away from the cliff to a point a half-mile from its foot ; thereabout he expected to find his man ; and thereabout he naturally failed. In the fleeting instant of his vision his imagination had been so wrought upon by the apparent grace and ease and intention of the marvellous performance that it did not occur to him that the line of march of aerial cavalry is directed downward, and that he could find the objects of his search at the very foot of the cliff. A half-hour later he returned to camp.

This officer was a wise man ; he knew better than to tell an incredible truth. He said nothing of what he had seen. But when the commander asked him if in his scout he had learned anything of advantage to the expedition, he answered :

“ Yes, sir ; there is no road leading down into this valley from the southward.”

The commander, knowing better, smiled.

After firing his shot Private Carter Druse reloaded his rifle and resumed his watch. Ten minutes had hardly passed when a Federal sergeant crept cautiously to him on hands and knees. Druse neither turned his head nor looked at him, but lay without motion or sign of recognition.

“ Did you fire ? ” the sergeant whispered.

“ Yes.”

“ At what ? ”

“ A horse. It was standing on yonder rock—pretty far out. You see it is no longer there. It went over the cliff.”

The man’s face was white, but he showed no other sign of emotion. Having answered, he turned away his face and said no more. The sergeant did not understand.

“ See here, Druse,” he said, after a moment’s silence, “ it’s no use making a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anybody on the horse ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Who ? ”

“ My father.”

The sergeant rose to his feet and walked away. “ Good God ! ” he said.

E. H. LACON WATSON

Escape

ESCAPE

HE was conscious of making no very grand appearance as he left the fine old Georgian house and heard the front door close behind him with a well-oiled click. Quite smooth—like everything else in that internal street—that street of lies and fair words. Nothing could have been blander than the tones of the eminent physician who had just pronounced his doom. At least, it had sounded to him like that, though clearly Sir James was minimising it as much as he could. "A simple operation," he had called it, lightly. But he knew well enough that men often died of it. There was Jerningham, one of his fellow-members at the club, who had died in a nursing-home the other day. The same thing, precisely. And Jerningham was a lot healthier than he had been, lately. Though he never said much about it, his heart used to palpitate cruelly sometimes.

He knew, as he left the house, that he had not taken it well. The deferential butler, even, had noticed something, and seemed really concerned. Would he care to have a small whisky? He looked rather white. And in fact he had been glad to hold for a moment to the balusters as he came down the broad staircase. A sort of giddiness came over him. But he refused a drink.

He ought to have been able to take it better than that. But he had always been—rather that way—ever since he could remember. One of those nervous, highly-strung fellows whose lives have been a burden to them from the start. He remembered perfectly well going to school for the first time: the desolate sensation of utter loneliness when he was left in the old college buildings, and his father had gone off to catch the train home. He felt exactly like a small fish dropped into a pool where there were a lot of hungry pike. It seemed to him that all his life had been spent scurrying into corners and trying to hide himself.

All through his life he had been struggling to escape notice, unsuccessfully. Always he was being dragged out, held up, and exposed.

What a poor life he had passed! Probably his own fault, very largely. It did not pay to adopt that attitude towards the world that had always been his—the attitude of the Shriner. If he had to go through it again now he would go on the other tack—if he could: he would be one of the bullies: he would impose his own will on the others. Easy enough, if you started right: the difficulty lay in just those first few steps. Or did it lie deeper down than that? Perhaps it did. He was just a Funk, by nature and habit. Never could he shake off that fatal disability now. It was too late.

True, he had been exceptionally unfortunate. Everywhere he went there was always one man who—well! who got on his nerves so that he hardly knew what to do with himself in his presence. Why were there such Beasts in the world? That had been the root of his trouble, really—the remarkable prevalence of Beasts. There had always been one, if not more, in his immediate neighbourhood at school, and again at college, and again when he was in business, and now at his club. Always some one man whose business it seemed to be to annoy and afflict him. And just now, too, when he had come into his little bit of money and been able to retire, and fancied that, at last, he might be going to get some enjoyment out of life.

Marrable was the man's name. (Even about the name there was something revolting: it sounded fat, and luscious, and over-ripe.) Pure imagination, no doubt, but from the first moment he had seen the man he had felt sure—No! he must manage somehow to get out of this habit of over-emphatic statement. Keep calm, judicial, under any provocation. In fact, he had not disliked the man so much just at first: he could vaguely recollect having thought him amusing. Amusing! Good God! Marrable used to sit there, in the card-room, just behind one of the players, and make comments. Of course no man ought to be allowed to do things of that sort: no man would in any really respectable club. That was the worst of the Camisis: it had fallen from its old position.

Of course, in a way, it was largely his own fault. He ought to have spoken to the other men—even complained

to the committee if necessary. If he had acted firmly Marrable might have been abolished by now—perhaps.

But he was so infernally popular. (Why on earth a man like Marrable should be tolerated, let alone popular, entirely beat him, as it must beat everyone who considered for a moment.) He was big, and fat, and easy-going, and had one of those rather comic high-pitched voices that you occasionally find with fat men. Somehow, when he said things in that squeaky voice it was difficult to help laughing—at first. He had laughed himself. Heaven help him! before Marrable had begun to turn his attention to his own weaknesses. That was where the fellow was so infernally deceitful. He began by being as polite as could be, to a stranger; but in a day or two little familiarities would begin to creep in: at the end of a week he was probably calling you by some absurd nickname, and making all the others laugh at the way you did certain things.

It was too much! At the mere thought of it Pontifex flushed all over: he could feel himself getting hot right down the back. Did I tell you his name was Pontifex? That was yet another of the many troubles that had oppressed him all his life, since he was a school boy. He had begun to hope that this trouble, at any rate, would have passed when he attained to middle age. But that man Marrable had seized hold of it at once. He called him "Ponty" or sometimes "Pontifex Maximus," and pretended to receive anything he said on the subject of Bridge with exaggerated respect. A man's name ought to be sacred from that sort of silly jesting, in any respectable club. He had spoken about it to more than one of the members. But they had only just laughed and turned it off with some careless remark.

It had been getting to such a pitch lately that Pontifex wondered if he would not have to resign. But he knew in his heart that he would never have the courage to resign from the Camisis now. He had belonged to it ever since he first came to London, more than thirty years ago. He was a creature of habit. He knew that he could not manage to exist now without dropping in there at tea-time and having a rubber or two afterwards, with a night out on Thursdays, when he stayed to dine and played on till about eleven.

It was Thursday afternoon. The last Thursday before his operation—perhaps the last Thursday he would ever spend

there. The next day he had to go to the nursing-home, and it must be confessed he did not like the thought of going there in the least. He tried not to think of it more than he could help, but it kept recurring. They would keep him there a day or two, "getting him ready" for the knife, as though he were some sort of sacrifice; and then one morning they would wheel him into the operating-room and stick stupefying things into his mouth or over his nose, and do what they like with him when he was all unconscious. And then—he might wake up again or he might not. And if he did, there was always the terrifying thought that he might awake to horrible agony—and death. If he was going to die he would rather die without coming round at all. But he did not want to die. He had always hated death.

Still, it was Thursday, and by the luck of things he had got just the sort of rubber he liked. A pleasant four, if they could keep it from being broken up by intruders. Perhaps the last evening's bridge he would have for a long while: possibly the last he would ever have. It sent a cold shiver through him when he thought of that.

He could not help saying something, after winning the first rubber, about that being his last night for some little time. They were all most sympathetic, and he was tempted to go into details a little (minimising it all, of course, in a half-humorous way) when he was aware suddenly of that hated voice just behind him. It gave him quite a start, for he had never heard Marrable come in.

"What! Old Ponty going to have an operation? Hope it'll improve his bridge, eh? Say, that's not a bad idea. Never heard of a man having an operation to improve his bridge before, did you?"

And he cackled in his silly, high-pitched voice, while the others laughed. That was one of the things that irritated Pontifex so much—the immunity of the beast from the common laws of civilised life. The other men never seemed to think he was saying anything ungentlemanly, or likely to be resented. Even Sellar, who was his partner, gave a sort of chuckle, and said something about the only operation that was likely to improve some players he knew. These fellows did not seem to realise that Bridge was a game demanding intense concentration of all the faculties—if you pretended to play at all.

"Sorry, partner," he said, "Of course I had it sitting. Such a row going on I simply couldn't think."

"Ponty, old man, that's a rotten excuse, and you know it." Marrable spoke in a sort of high-pitched chuckle, as though he were immensely amused. For one moment Pontifex was aware of a sudden blurring of the sight, as though a film had come over his eyes. He saw the room through a russet cloud. His fingers twitched. Suppose now—just suppose he sprang at the man suddenly, from behind, when no one was there, and got his hands once firmly on that bulging neck, and held on! It seemed to him he could feel the vast bulk of the man struggling underneath him—at first—and then gradually growing still. Oh, yes! he could be trusted to hold on if he once got him.

The cloud before his eyes faded slowly. He came to himself. That must be what they meant when they spoke of "seeing red," he thought. Well, there was a reddish tinge about that mist—a real sensation of colour. And it was exactly as though something had gone in his head. He could almost hear the snap. With it vanished, in a moment, all the old inhibitions, the defensive walls of civilisation that had been growing up round him since the days of his childhood. He seemed to see right down into his real self—an entirely different self from any he had known before.

With a tremendous effort he pulled himself back to the pretence of ordinary social life. That voice was still cackling about something. Drinks! Would he have a drink? No, certainly not: Marrable knew well enough that he never took anything. He was aware, in the inner recesses of his brain, of a curious glowing heat. He could see it with his mind's eye—a tiny red spark, deep down. Perhaps it was as well that he had settled to go into the nursing-home the next day. Otherwise—probably this was just how those things happened. After all, a murderer was not a different being from the ordinary man: he was often merely one of ourselves who had been pestered and bothered until he simply could not stand it any longer—until something went cr-rack in his head, as his own had gone.

Well, if Marrable meant to stay he would have to go home, that was all. In his present state, he said to himself, he simply could not stand it. Of course his last evening had been wrecked, but that was only what he might have expected.

Marrable was absolutely certain to come in just that very night of all others: he might have known it. The sound of his voice behind him was almost more than he could bear. He was conscious that he could not keep the muscles of his face completely under control. Sellar, his partner, he thought was looking at him rather narrowly. And as he dealt the cards he could see his hand shaking.

"I'm on the verge," Pontifex said to himself, "absolutely on the edge of a breakdown. I wonder what I ought to do."

He started to walk back from the club along the Embankment, slipping away quietly at the end of a rubber, with Marrable still sitting there and making a nuisance of himself all round. How b'essed it was to get out into the open air all by himself! And how quiet it was there! Cleopatra's Needle, and the Belgian memorial opposite. (Surely that woman's neck was ridiculously long!) How well he remembered the Zeppelins coming over! He had watched one of them from his window up to the Temple there, with all the shells bursting round her—a silvery, cigar-shaped thing caught in the beam of a dozen searchlights. Just such another night as that. He leaned against the parapet and looked down on the smoothly flowing river. Something pressed against his chest, and he felt in his pocket for the cause. Of course! he had quite forgotten it—the Swedish knife that his nephew had wanted for a birthday present: he had looked in at Thompson's and bought it only a few minutes before going to the club, meaning to send it on from there. Well, it would have to be sent from his rooms now—or the nursing home. Murderous-looking things, those Swedish knives! You opened them out and stuck them in that solid wooden handle and they were firm as a rock. You could stab a man with a thing like that. Just as well, perhaps, that he had not remembered it a few minutes ago at the club. If it had been ready in his hand—like that—

A hand clapped him roughly on the shoulder, giving him such a start that for a moment he went quite dizzy. Then came Marrable's voice.

"Now, then, none o' that. Will you come along quiet, or shall I 'ave to tyke yer?" And then that high, cackling laugh.

It was the laugh that finished him. He could not stand that noise. It oppressed him as though an actual physical

pain had shot through him, spurring him to sudden action. He turned and leapt at the man like some wild animal. As he leapt he fancied he could hear a sort of snarling cry of rage: it sounded quite outside himself, and yet he felt, somehow, it proceeded from his own mouth. Marrable, compared with himself, was a big, powerful man; but the attack took him so much by surprise that he went over with hardly a struggle or a sound. His arms went up and waved in the air as he tried frantically to maintain his balance: then his foot seemed to catch in something and he went over backwards, Pontifex on the top of him. He had got a firm grip of his collar with his left hand at that first leap, and with his right, holding the Swedish knife, he stabbed twice, fiercely, as they lay on the pavement. He could feel the point sink in—deep: his whole soul revelled in the feeling. That would do for Marrable: that would stop him talking in the club for a bit—at any rate, in that silly, high-pitched voice. Damn it! Something had snapped in his head again, and there was a red mist in front of everything. The body beneath him had gone quite limp.

Pontifex let go and scrambled up unsteadily. He could not see very well, but there was the body lying huddled on the pavement. The hat had flown off and was lying in the gutter. Marrable was quiet enough now. Not a sound had he uttered since that silly pretence of being a policeman. Damn him!

He became suddenly conscious of the knife still grasped in his hand. It was as though it stung him, like a snake, and he hurled it out over the parapet into the river with a gesture of repulsion. That was the luck of the thing, too: just the sort of thing that would happen to him of all people—that he should have been holding that knife, ready in its shaft, at the precise moment when Marrable came along. He just *had* to strike out at him. The purest nervous reflex action. But—they would hardly be likely to accept that if they got him in the dock, with some parchment-faced old judge sitting to try him. Murder—they would call it. Murder!

Pontifex felt he could not stay there another moment on any consideration. He was seized with a panic. Fortunately, there was not a soul in sight—unless that was a figure of a man in the distance slinking along by the other side of the road, towards Charing Cross.

His instinct was to run—run away as swiftly as he could—before anyone appeared. He took two or three steps, but no! it would never do to be seen running, especially at that hour. The first policeman who saw him would obviously wonder what was up, and stop him, and begin to ask questions. What he had to do was to get back to his rooms in the Temple as soon as possible without attracting attention. He would turn up the next dark street and get into the Strand, where there was always traffic enough to make a man inconspicuous. And by the grace of God he reached the Strand, up the next street, without meeting anyone at all.

There was Big Ben striking. It was only ten o'clock yet. A few minutes before he had been sitting at the bridge-table playing a rubber, with Marrable close behind him. Why should he not go back there? He wanted company. Besides, it might possibly be useful if he got back in time to cut in again for the next rubber. No one had seen him go out, so far as he knew: at the Camisis the hall porter was often away from his post at that hour of the night: he might easily be able to slink in again and hang up his hat and pretend he had only gone into the other room when they had cut him out. At any rate, he would be in the light and the company of his fellows. He turned round.

Of course, at the worst, it was all an accident. He had never meant to kill him. The merest outbreak of nervous irritation—and no wonder—with a man coming up behind like that playing the goat. And no one had seen him: he was certain of that; nor was it in the least likely that anyone would suspect him of a crime of violence. His reputation at the club would be in his favour.

Well, Marrable would not insult him any more now, at any rate.

Pontifex began to wonder what the police were doing. Had they found the body? Surely someone must have stumbled across it by now. What happened when one found a dead body? His mind, it seemed to him, was working with preternatural speed, rather as though a series of pictures were being projected on a screen in front of him.

That knife of his now! Ought he to have thrown it away like that, into the river? They might find it. Oh, yes, it sounded absurd, but that was just the sort of thing that always happened: they might sweep it up in a net or

something and trace it to him. They could not help tracing it, once found. Of course, he ought never to have thrown it away—only he felt that he simply could not keep it any longer: it burnt his hand: it might have been made of red-hot iron. Why the shop where he had bought it was only a few yards off. To be sure, he had not been there before, so far as he recollected—but that was nothing: they would parade him for inspection and he would be recognised. He saw the picture as clearly as anything: there he stood in a row of figures, inwardly shivering, trying to look composed; and there was Thompson's assistant, the man who had sold him the knife, walking down the line slowly, scrutinising them one by one. Oh, it was hopeless.

He had only walked a few yards while all this passed through his mind. And then he caught sight of himself reflected in a shop window, and the sight gave him such a shock that he all but fell down. In fact he did stagger, and had to catch hold of a lamp-post to steady himself. He was without a hat.

Well, that did for him, of course. His hat must have fallen off when he and Marrable were having that struggle, and in the excitement of the moment he had never noticed it. It must be lying there still, a damning piece of evidence—unless by some chance it had fallen into the river, or been blown away into the Embankment Gardens or somehow managed to dispose of itself. But to think of him coming all that way without discovering that he had left it behind! He had put it on at the club before leaving—yes! of course he had—a man did not go out into the streets from his club and leave his hat on the peg. He must have been dazed by the fall when they had gone down together. It had been a bit of a crash, and it was some time before he recovered himself. He remembered seeing a hat lying there, in the gutter, too. He shivered.

Perhaps there was just a chance still—if he went straight back—down the next turning. It was the only chance. There were not many people about that night, and it was only a minute or two since it had happened. If he could only get there before the police! They would never suspect him if he were the first to discover the body and give the alarm. His hat had blown off, and he was following it up when he ran into this—terrible thing. That would be his story.

He was on the Embankment again—and once more there did not seem to be a soul in sight. What extraordinary luck! His heart gave a bound, and he hurried on towards the spot. Ah! he was barely in time: there were two or three men approaching from the opposite direction. Well, he would get there first and give the alarm. There was his hat, just in front of him, and there was the huddled mass of clothes, still lying on the pavement. He waved his hands and shouted to the little party who were advancing. They took no notice.

And then, suddenly, he heard a voice—the well-known squeaky, high-pitched voice of Marrable. There he was, in the centre of a group, explaining what had happened.

“I give you my word,” he was saying, “I only just touched the poor chap on the back. Must have been nervous, for he gave no end of a jump, and his arms went up, just like that. Thought he was going to hit me. Didn’t like the look of him at all. And then the poor old chap collapsed suddenly, before you could say knife, and fell on his face. I thought I’d better come and let you know.

A man in constable’s uniform bent down and turned the huddled figure over gently.

“’Art, it looks like,” he said. And Pontifex found himself looking down at his own face.

E. M. DELAFIELD

Squirrel in a Cage

SQUIRREL IN A CAGE

SHE glanced up and down the platform, as she alighted from the train, pretending to herself, and to the ever-present recorder of her days and nights, that she was not actuated by a faint, shadowy hope of seeing Berringer.

He had hardly ever come to meet her train, as a matter of fact, even in the old days of a year ago. But once, at the very beginning, he had been there. She hadn't told him what train she was coming up by, and he had waited at Waterloo Station from eleven o'clock until half-past three, so that they might have the additional half hour together.

Sacha Michaelson had never travelled anywhere by train since then without remembering that.

Berringer would never be there any more. For the past three months she'd realised that he was tiring of it. Satiated, because she'd given him all she had to give, and had let him know, with reckless prodigality, the extent of her love.

"She had all the capacity for passion of the woman who has southern blood in her veins. An infinite hunger for love looked out of her dark, smouldering gaze."

"Taxi! To No. 103, Frinton Street, please. It's just off Marylebone Road."

"She pulled open the door and stepped into the taxi, the heavy fur border of her velvet coat swinging against her slim legs as she did so. More than one man glanced after the straight, slender figure."

The very last time, probably that she'd ever go to the Frinton Street room. After all, they hadn't met there so very many times. At first he'd simply called for her at her club, and they'd gone to lunch or dine at remote Soho restaurants.

On the third day of May—would there ever come a time when she'd not remember that date?—she'd been in town for a week at the three-roomed flat of a cousin who was

abroad. And it was after that that Berringer had taken the studio in Frinton Street.

There was a strip of looking-glass in the taxi, and Sacha Michaelson mechanically adjusted her hair beneath her low scarlet hat and passed her tiny powder-puff across her face.

Did it really matter whether she looked pretty or not to-day? Impossible to believe that it didn't matter, that Berringer wouldn't see. And yet it was in order to end it all, to make a clean break, that she was meeting him to-day.

Sacha remembered her last letter, that she had written in imagination so many times before she had written it on paper.

"Ian, dear, let's be honest and not spoil things. We made a compact once, that if either of us grew tired it should finish—then and there. Not drag on, with expostulations and scenes—unthinkable between us. Ian, if the time has come now, won't you be honest with me? I shan't make it difficult for you. I'm coming to London on Wednesday and I want to see you, even if it's only to say good-bye—SACHA."

Although it was weeks since he had ceased to answer her letters by return of post, she had the reply to that one immediately, asking her to come to Frinton Street at four o'clock. The real answer lay in the only other sentence that the note contained. "As you say, we swore to be honest with one another. But it's very hard sometimes, and I'm hating myself now."

She knew it was the end, of course.

No. What he meant was that he couldn't stand the treachery of it—although it was he who had passionately urged, in the beginning, that she owed no loyalty to a husband whom she had never loved. He had come to feel that he could not face Charlie any more. . . .

What he meant was that their love could find its expression in daily letters, in constant spiritual awareness of one another—that the subterfuges and lies of the Frinton Street rendezvous were a degradation of the most beautiful thing that life could ever hold for either. Long ago she had said that to him. Now he saw it like that, too. . . .

What he meant was that they were imprudent and reckless, risking the discovery that would be fatal to their happiness. He had suddenly become afraid—for her, and for the safety of their wonderful secret life.

What was it he meant?

That he had ceased to love her.

The sword-like stab of that utter certainty went through her again. Ian Berringer was tired of her.

It had been real, too, for him as for her whilst it lasted.

For him, now, it had ceased.

Assertion and negation, intuition and denial, going round and round to the senseless clamour of the outer world, like the painted horses of a merry-go-round to the mechanical music accompanying its dizzy gyrations.

There was the same faint sense of physical sickness that a too-prolonged gazing at the merry-go-round would have produced.

The grinding wheels of the taxi jarred in stopping as the merry-go-round might have jarred.

"She wrenched open the door and stepped out of the taxi, the heavy fur border of her velvet coat swinging . . . her slim, unglowed hand found the coins in her purse . . . she paid the driver . . ."

She had a key, and she let herself into the narrow, secretive-looking house, and went up the steep stairs.

She and Berringer had agreed long ago that it was wiser for him to await her inside the studio. Her heart was beating so quickly that she stopped for an instant outside the shut door on the second floor.

Always the near approach of that moment when she would see him again had made her heart throb wildly, and always she had paused, in an ineffectual attempt to regain control of her racing breath, behind the door.

In the early days he had torn open the door and his hands had drawn her over the threshold. Later he had waited inside the room, his face turned to the door. And once—the last time she had been there—he had been writing at the table in the window and had sprung up at the sight of her, with vague, startled eyes and the exclamation, "I never heard you arrive!"

As usual her desperate attempt to visualise him clearly before they actually met failed. Every mental and emotional faculty was absorbed in a passion of anticipation.

"Her hand was shaking as she opened the door and sharply closed it behind her."

Berringer faced her as she entered.

He was standing by the window, his hands thrust into his pockets, and he was shifting the weight of his body from

his heels to the balls of his feet with a very characteristic movement.

The sense of his virility, his height, his masculine strength rushed over her again. The light, startling grey of his eyes in his swarthy face—the heavy line of his dark, irregular brows, the jut of his lower lip—all came as so many vivid impressions thrust upon her recognition.

"Sacha."

"Ian."

"Her proud delicate air of aloofness made it impossible for him to touch her."

She moved blindly towards him, suffering incredibly more because he had hesitated.

He looked at her for an instant—at her mouth, not into her eyes—and then kissed her. She could only remember, with a vividness that appalled her, their other kisses, prolonged until pain and ecstasy had mingled.

"She sank into a chair, her knees trembling beneath her. She raised her heavy-lidded hazel eyes to his, and he saw that she must have wept all night."

"And how is Sacha?" His voice held the inflexions that belonged to it when he was ill-at-ease.

He had begun the balancing movement again, shifting his weight from heels to toes, his hands in his pockets.

"You got my letter?"

"Yes, I got your letter.

After the pause he laughed uneasily.

"Of course I got it, or I shouldn't have known you were coming up to-day, should I? Besides, I answered it."

"Of course you did. How stupid of me!"

Inanities to try to lighten the all but unendurable tension between them.

"She was a brave woman—the bravest that he had ever known. He realised that she was in hell, and giving no sign of it."

It was difficult to speak, but to bear the silence was more difficult still.

"Ian, you must tell me. Is there somebody else?"

She could see that he was instantly relieved. The balancing movement stopped and he looked her straight in the face at last. "No, I swear to you that there isn't, Sacha."

"You aren't going to marry—some girl?"

"Good lord, no!"

"It's only that—you're tired of it. The thing has just naturally come to an end?"

"I expect—d'you mind if I smoke?—I expect that——"

"Of course—please, do."

"A cigarette?"

He held out his case.

"I'm sorry; I've none of the kind you like."

Did he remember, as she did, that there had been a time when his case had always been supplied, for her, with the Russian cigarette that she liked?"

"No, thank you, I won't smoke. I've got some of my own somewhere."

"Sure you won't?"

"Quite sure, thanks."

He struck a match, shielding the flame very carefully with strong, blunt finger-tips from some imaginary draught.

She moistened her dry lips with the tip of her tongue.

"What were you going to say, Ian?"

"Only that—that I expect, if we're to be honest, Sacha—we're both in the same boat. We've both got to the stage of realising that it—it was wonderful while it lasted, but it isn't really the thing we took it for. Not, I mean, something that's going to last a lifetime. Perhaps nothing ever is."

The forlorn sound that came from his lips might have passed for a laugh. His eyes implored her to help him. If he could feel that she believed in his belief that their satiety was mutual he wouldn't feel like a cad. That was what he meant.

"She had always understood him, and she did not fail him now. With heartbreak in her eyes, her mouth lied gallantly. She was the bravest woman that he had ever known."

No. It was too hard.

"She had always been honest with him, and not even for pride's sake would she lie to him now. She was the most honest woman that he had ever known—and the bravest."

"There's something about me you've not understood yet, Ian. I'm faithful. You're the only man that's ever counted for anything in my life. You'll be the only one, always. No one except Charlie has ever even kissed me, except you. You know it's true."

"Yes."

He had marvelled over it in the past and told her that

she had come to him almost like a young girl to her first lover.

"Ian, with me it's for always. I don't mind saying it to you because after this we shan't ever see one another again. I've known that it was going to end, of course—that you were—getting over it—I—I'm glad you've told me the truth."

"*'I—I'm glad you've told me the truth.' There was the slightest possible break in her voice, but her steady gaze never faltered . . . the bravest woman that he had ever known.*"

"It was the compact that we should tell one another the truth, Sacha."

"I know."

"God knows I've felt a hound. I could shoot myself."

How unconvincing! He felt wretched, angry and uncomfortable. Not really unhappy, with the unhappiness that tears and rends the spirit as torture tears and rends the body; that returns again and again in the night to turn darkness and quiet and solitude into things of unspeakable dread.

"A clean break is the only possible way to end it. That's why I came up to-day—for the last time. So that we could say good-bye."

Once before they'd said good-bye. At the very beginning, when she had told him that it was their duty to part, and after long argument he had given in, and agreed that they should meet as friends but never as lovers.

"But we shall always know that we care," he'd said then, holding her in his arms.

And the poignancy of their farewell, of their last despairing kisses, had reached the point at which pain is merged into a veritable refinement of bliss.

She had gone away that time, her eyes aching and smarting from the tears that she had shed, but upheld by the glory of their shared renunciation, and with the ever-present consciousness of Ian's awareness of her and of her courage and pain, like a song in her heart.

Now, again, she would have to go away, and this time with the bleak, stark knowledge that her suffering was unshared and unrecognised. It was impossible, because intolerable, that he should recognise it.

"It's over. We won't go on writing or anything. Only tell me what's made you change? I shall understand."

"Looking up at him she even achieved the supreme gallantry of a smile. But he saw that the slim hands were gripped together until the knuckles showed white."

"That's—that's very sporting of you, Sacha."

His voice held great embarrassment. Perhaps he was wondering whether she remembered that once he had said he should eschew slang because she hated it so.

"I always have understood, Ian, haven't I?"

He made no reply.

Suddenly anger flared up in her.

"You know I have. You can't say I'm not making it easy for you. You can't say that I haven't always understood you from the very beginning. When have I failed you, ever?"

"It's not that—you haven't, I know. But no man can live on the heights always, Sacha. Oh, it's my inadequacy, I know. Put it down to that, if you want a reason. I couldn't live on the heights."

"The face that looked up at him was white to the lips."

"Have I been exacting, Ian?"

"Yes. You're forcing me to say it. God knows I didn't want to."

"And if I—I were to be less exacting?"

The words wrenched at her pride all but unendurably. Stronger than her pride was the insane hope that by her sacrifice of it she might regain his love.

"Sacha, don't! What's the use? Nothing can bring dead things to life again. Forget me as fast as you can. It shouldn't be difficult. You'll find someone else—less unworthy . . . Don't think I don't despise myself. I know what you must think of me—you've been as generous as a woman could be—and I'm letting you down."

"Ian, Ian, don't you understand that whatever you do to me I'm yours, always and absolutely?"

"It was a cry of selfless, passionate love. He caught his breath at the wonder of it. Something broke within him and the next moment he was on his knees beside her, his arms round her, his face against her breast. They were together again."

"For Heaven's sake, Sacha, don't let's have a scene. Look here, I can't stand this——"

"I want to make an end of this. (Good God what a brute I am!) I'll go if you like, and you stay here and—and rest till it's time for your train. Look here, shall I tell

the woman to bring you up a cup of tea or something?"

"She shook her head, speechless. It had come. Instinctively she rose to her feet and faced him without flinching. She was the bravest woman he had ever known."

"You aren't going to faint, are you?"

"No, I'm not going to faint, Ian."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

The impatience in his voice was like the rasp of a file.

"Nothing. You'd better go. I can't bear any more."

"Sacha, I'm sorry—you must believe that I'm sorry. I shouldn't ever have told you, only I knew you'd find out for yourself."

All the time he was edging towards the door. His hand was grasping eagerly at the handle.

"If ever you want me again, Ian——"

Had she said that?

"Sacha . . . I . . . O good Lord!"

He had opened the door, and in an instant it had shut behind him with a hard, defiant sound.

At one moment she had seen his dark, tormented face beneath its black plume of hair, his thick hirsute hands, his broad shoulders, and at the next moment he was gone, and she could not visualise him clearly any more than she had ever been able to visualise him clearly in his absence.

Impossible to suffer like this and live. There must somewhere be a breaking-point, a limit to endurance. . . .

"She found that she was tearing her lace handkerchief to strips between her fingers. Her arms were outflung across the table, her head pressed against them, whilst sobs shook her from head to foot. She never heard the door open, nor Ian Berringer's step across the room. His arms were round her in the old, protective clasp, and his lips had found hers before she saw him . . ."

Silence, heavy and deathly, hung over the room. It was broken by her own sobs and stifled half-screams.

There was no step upon the stairs.

Berringer did not come back.

Sacha Michaelson, after a long while, got up and gazed at her disfigured face in the mirror over the mantelpiece. Her nose and mouth were hideously swollen, her eyes sunken in discoloured sockets. A patch of crimson under each lower lid stood out upon the livid pallor of her face. With exactly the same mechanical gesture that she had used

in the taxi she touched the hair beneath her hat-brim, and passed the little powder-puff across her face.

She dragged herself down the stairs and into the street.

A taxi crawled past her and she signed to the driver.

"Waterloo Station."

"She raised eyelids that felt curiously stiff with crying to the man's face, and he thought he had never seen so sad a look before. She stepped into the taxi—the heavy fur border of her velvet coat . . ."

The wheels of the taxi bore her away to the noise and the restless, incessant movement of Waterloo Station.

She glanced round the vast booking-hall, pretending to herself, and to the ever-present recorder of her days and nights, that she was not actuated by a faint, shadowy hope of seeing Berringer.

HECTOR BOLITHO

The Albatross

THE ALBATROSS

I [1912]

I MET Captain Angermann for the first time in Bremerhaven before the war. He lived in a jolly little blue and white house, away from the docks and crowded buildings of the port. The front path led up to the door, under four arches of huge bleached whalebones. From the front arch he had suspended a small lifebelt, with the name of the house, *Sans Souci*, painted on it, in his own meticulous letters.

Captain Angermann was good-looking in a hard, Prussian sort of way. He was dark and strong, and he walked arrogantly. He was something of a scholar, too, for he had edited a book on sea birds. He was more proud of this than of having taken a full-rigged ship around the Horn before he was thirty.

I had been asked by a publisher in Munich to write a treatise on albatrosses. It may sound dull, written down like that. But no man could think albatrosses dull, once he had seen them; white, big, and sharp-winged, wheeling above the blue silk water of the Pacific, their mighty wings stretched fourteen feet across the sky. I used to see them off the New Zealand coast, myself stretched on the sun-baked deck, lazy, hot, stripped to the waist, watching their big wings which never seemed to tire, their rhythmic whirling, their sudden swoop down to the tide when a steward threw potato peelings over the side of the ship.

It was no pain or trial to me when the little, eager publisher in Munich said he'd like me to write the treatise for him. It was through him that I went to Bremerhaven, out of the crowded streets of the port, up under the whalebone arches, to the little white and blue house, with the letter of introduction to Ernst Angermann.

He came to the door himself when I knocked. He seemed

to be too big for the little house, as if he might stretch out his iron arms and crumple the walls in his hands. But this sense of size left him when we sat on either side of a table to talk. His movements were quick, his eyes were sparkling, and his hands moved incessantly, lean and strong and brown, among the papers which lay between us. "Albatrosses," he said. And then he repeated it twice, giving the two ss's a little hiss as he said them. "Albatrosses."

His wife appeared with a jug of beer. She was a Bavarian, I suppose, fair, with a soft voice and calm eyes. She seemed to be frightened and self-conscious, willing to smile, but eager to be back again among her kitchen things.

We leaned across the table again, lifting the mugs of beer, letting the lids shut down with a tap after each draught. It was much more fun drinking thus than from our own dull, English tumblers.

"But there are many sea birds," he said. "Why is it that you are interested mostly in albatrosses?"

"It is mostly because I have always thought them interesting and strong and beautiful," I answered. "They have so much more character than—than eagles, or any other birds for that matter—it is difficult to explain—but I always think there is something half human about them."

Captain Angermann smiled, his slow lips moving and showing his white, pointed teeth. "That is true; there is something half human about them. But it is not for this that you came. Your letter says that you wish to know of this nests at Tristan da Cunha."

Ernst Angermann had been at Tristan. He opened a portfolio full of minute and patiently made drawings on pale-blue paper. With his quick, sharp hands turning over the leaves, he told me what I had set out to know. He had seen the strange albatross courtship dances, he had seen their lonely white eggs, lying upon the open ground. He had measured them and watched them, and each little fact that fell so glibly from his lips was illustrated by one of the hundreds of little sketches. There was one of a bird, its wings fourteen feet spread, so heavy with food that it lay, gorged and inert, upon the rocks. I had never seen such drawings, with lace-like details of rocks and wings, and, about the edge of each page, minute sketches of beaks and wings and claws.

My pencil moved rapidly as he spoke and, at the end, he chose one drawing of an albatross in flight and lifted it up from the portfolio. He had coloured it with chinese white, so that, drawn upon the blue paper, it looked as if it flew against the sky.

"And this drawing you must accept from me," he said.

"There you have found what I always see," I told him.

"You have made the bird seem mournful and remote—do you know what I mean?—no other birds have as much expression. It is absurd to think that there could be much expression on the face of a bird. But here you have it—it is half in their eyes. A sort of human sensibility; anybody who has seen them fly must have seen it too, don't you think?"

"You are right," he said. "But do you know the legend about the albatross? Do you know that we people of the sea believe that they bear the souls of dead mariners in their white breasts?"

I said that I too had heard the story and I quoted him then the lines from "The Ancient Mariner."

"But more than that," he said. "In the archives in Bremen there is a diary of an early captain which I have seen. He sailed far away in strange places, more than two hundred years ago. I did not read it all, when I was allowed to see it some years ago. But there was a long account of a journey he made around the Horn. I have been there myself, in a full-rigged ship."

"An extraordinary experience?" I said.

"No, I went when it was peaceful and calm. But when this man went, two hundred years ago . . . his name was Beck . . . he sailed through a storm which should have destroyed him. He wrote that the forked lightning was so low that it passed between the masts. Meteors fell on the ship and burned. There seems to have been a miracle which carried her through the storm. When he turned north again, with the storm past and the Andes rising against the sky, so that he could see them, so close were they into the shore, they came upon a hulk, a *ghost-ship*, he called it. Of course, his fancy may have been distorted by the strain of the storm. But others say they have seen the strange ghost-ship of the Horn and heard its bells. They ring through the mists and rain, whether there is a storm or whether it is calm. This

good man Beck wrote about ten pages in this curious little yellow diary of his. And he said the ship was transparent like a human ghost."

"And what of the albatrosses? Surely they were not there so soon after the storm."

"That is the magic touch and end of Beck's story," added Angermann. "He wrote that as the ghost-ship moved slowly past, with his own sailors shivering on the deck, the Catholics among them crossing themselves and running their rosaries through their agitated fingers, eleven great white birds circled over the transparent hulk, circling and swooping down, and moving forward as the spectre drifted on."

"There could be no food for them."

"No, but Beck added his assurance that the story of the albatross was true—that the birds bore the souls of the sailors who had perished in the ship when she was burned. There are many early manuscripts written by sailors, and every port has its legend about the birds. I am a matter-of-fact German scholar," Angermann added, "and I do not allow myself the fancies and romantic imagery of the Latins. I am a scientist and not a poet. But, I believe that even science itself could find some reason why a legend grows and stays."

"Ghosts of animals are not rare—that is, if you believe in ghosts at all," I said.

"Ah, but this is not the ghost of an animal. The living bird; you yourself have said that they have a mournful, half-human character. The living bird bears the soul of the mariner over the water he loved. Anyway, it is a pretty legend, although it can have no place in your treatise," he added.

I rolled up my drawing carefully. We shook hands, Angermann snapping his heels and bowing with smart, Prussian correctness. I went back into the crowded port of Bremerhaven.

II [1920]

I was choking in the middle of an Australian summer, when I suddenly made up my mind to escape. Within two days I found myself on the deck of the Halberstadt. I think she was the first German freighter to sail from Australia after the war. She was bound for Naples, Genoa and Bremen.

I was the only British passenger; the others were sad German people who had been interned in Australia all through the long mutilated years since 1914. We were twelve, and we dined with the captain and officers in the saloon. I can remember the first night, after we had steamed away from Sydney Harbour, the light wilting on the black horizon and the odd sense of excited loneliness that came over me as I lay in my cabin, listening to the expatriated exiles singing in the saloon.

We did not sail until almost midnight. So I did not meet the captain until I went into the saloon for breakfast next morning. It wasn't easy, sitting down to eat with all these sad people who had been my country's enemy two years before.

I had almost finished my breakfast when the Captain came in, older, taller it seemed, but the same Angermann who had walked with me to the door of his cottage in Bremerhaven, seven or eight years before. He was not a man to be surprised, and beyond a spontaneous smile, which showed that he was pleased to see me again, he did nothing and said nothing as he sat down at the other end of the table. There were three more ports before we set out on the great stretch of the Indian Ocean and we did not meet at meals for two days. He was forever on the bridge or dining alone in his cabin. But as we left Adelaide, with the ship heavy with this strange, first post-war cargo for Germany, he sent me a message and asked me to dine with him in his cabin that night.

It was the first of many wonderful and uncanny evenings on the Halberstadt and now, as I allow my mind to pass back over the hours of conversation we had together, it is difficult to choose just those occasions and moments which contribute to this story of the strangest and most versatile man I have ever met.

In all our talks I had left the subject of albatrosses alone. Perhaps he had seen my treatise and wished to avoid mentioning it. I had always felt humble and self-conscious about its merits myself.

"Your treatise on albatrosses," he said one night. "It was very good. But much has been discovered since then."

We had been talking of the development of spiritual mediums and of the possibility of transferring the spirit of

a being from one physical body to another. The subject led him into a labyrinth of strange and picturesque notions. "You remember," he said, "how we talked of the albatrosses bearing the souls—the spirits of dead sailors. If the spirit, which is not bound by physical bonds, can pass to another physical body at death, why can't it be made to pass from one person to another in life—or from one animal to another? The spirit or the soul is as separate from the body and as independent of its prison as if it were a bird in an open cage. Why cannot the soul—the bird—fly from its prison and rest where it wishes?"

I smiled, but I had no answer. He went on with the fanciful thought: "I have studied this deeply, in these lonely years of the war. I have no wish to stay always within my physical body," he added. And as he said it, a new intensity and strain came into his voice. "I am very tired of my physical body," he said.

He talked on, this night and on other nights, and there was no hindrance to the interest of listening to him and no hindrance to the peace of the ship, except the deadly enmity which existed between Angermann and his second officer.

The reasons for this antagonism were a mystery to me, until a day when we had gathered on the aft-deck to see the butcher kill the pig which used to nose about the galley and men's quarters, waiting for the day when we should want him to give up the ghost for our appetites.

I stood near enough to two sailors to hear their conversation, which was carried on in Hamburg dialect. They began with lewd memories of their travels and of adventures in Port Said. When Captain Angermann appeared on the deck, they lowered their voices and included him in their gossip. To set down their remarks about the second officer would shock and confuse, for the vulgar facts were clouded by irrelevant babble, but they held my attention from the moment when one of them said that Angermann and the second officer had been on the same ship seven years before.

The little eager sailor with the leather shirt was full of information. Angermann had a cruel, perhaps a mad, side to his nature; indeed, it seemed that all his brutality poured itself upon the unfortunate man who was unable to escape from him. The reason! One day, seven years before, this

man, whose name was Lewisohn, had shot an albatross—the ship, they said, was carrying Christmas toys from Hamburg to Sydney—the last time that Australian children played with German toys before the war came.

Lewisohn was an apprentice then and he was new to the South. The ship had called at Fremantle and some of her Noah's arks and dolls had been loaded on to the dry, sun-baked wharf, before she sailed south again. The Hamburg sailor had a tongue for a good story, and he refreshed the narrative with a hundred picturesque little details which escape me now. He talked of a calm, cool evening, after the dreary heat of the tropics, and of a lonely albatross which had joined the ship, its milky wings cutting the evening light. Angermann had been watching the bird rising and falling above the tide. The sailor even told of Angermann's cigar, of how it hung, unsmoked between his fingers, as he stood, hypnotised by the rhythm of the bird as it flew in, nearer to the ship. And then Angermann had seen Lewisohn little more than a boy then, creeping along between the barrels, until he was beneath the albatross, when its wide wings carried it in, above the ship. Before Angermann could call or move, Lewisohn had raised a rifle and had fired.

The bird had fallen on the deck, its enormous wings beating the air, until it crumpled up in a miserable white heap. Angermann had run down and struck the boy with a telescope—the ship had been in a fever of excitement for two days. Lewisohn was still unconscious when the ship came to Sydney and he was left on shore.

From this point the sailor knew nothing—but he added: "Angermann is clever, but he is mad." And I suddenly realised this myself, also—clever, but mad.

As if the strings of a marionette show had been suddenly pulled, Angermann and Lewisohn appeared on the deck together, and I watched Lewisohn edging away from him.

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I was the lonely spectator of the next, astounding chapter in Angermann's story. We were coming into warmer water, and at night I left the saloon with my coffee cup in my hand, to drink it in the cool quiet of the stern of the ship. I sat upon a barrel, in the shadows, where I could see without being seen. I was leaning back, in a half sleep, when I heard

something move near me. I opened my eyes to see Captain Angermann walk to the stern rails and lean over looking down into the phosphorescent maelstrom in our wake. He lifted his arms—his hands were white enough to look like two birds as he waved them in the dark. The stern light was shielded so that it lit only the water behind us. Angermann moved a few feet along the rail of the ship and after turning, to be sure he was alone, he waved his hands again. The darkness in front of him shivered, and the vast wings of an albatross came in towards him, beating the air, and the very rails upon which he was leaning. Angermann seemed to be caressed by the big wings; they beat about him, so close that his black shape was swallowed into the agitated white feathers.

When the albatross moved away from the ship, Angermann had disappeared into the great white body which was flying away into the night. The moment was so fantastic that I could not believe in it. I ran back to the saloon. I can remember kicking my coffee cup along the deck and leaving it broken, in the scuppers. Angermann was not in the saloon, nor was he in his cabin. I was afraid to tell anybody of what I had seen. I had a sneaking fear of appearing ridiculous. So I sat in the saloon and waited. It was twelve o'clock before Angermann came in—he ate a piece of *apfelkuchen*, drank a glass of beer, and went to his cabin.

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Two days after this was the birthday of Lewisohn. On this night, Captain Angermann dined alone in his cabin and Lewisohn enjoyed the escape from his vigilance—indeed, he sent bottles of wine and cognac around the table and became so drunk himself that we sat up, in stiff fear, hoping that Angermann would not come in and see him. Lewisohn was more pathetic than terrible. He had sneaking feet and shifting eyes. Even in his uniform he managed to reveal his vulgarity. A yellow handkerchief, a bracelet on his podgy, hairless wrist.

He drank a last glass of cognac, smacking the table with his left hand and giving us a toast which was a silly, meaningless indecency. At that moment Captain Angermann came into the saloon, quietly. He stood behind Lewisohn and snatched the glass from his hand. Lewisohn jumped to his uncertain

feet and, as he reeled, Angermann pinned his arms behind his back and pushed him out of the saloon. Within a minute the Captain was back again, angry and black, but too certain of his self-control to speak in anything but a slow, quiet voice. He spoke to me. "I am sorry and ashamed for my ship that you should see this. He will not dine in the saloon again."

"It is his birthday, Captain Angermann," I pleaded.

"Then I am sorry he ever had his first birthday," he answered. "The place for pigs is not in the saloon of my ship." He left us then and we settled down to play a game of skat. We must have been playing for an hour (I remember, that I had just picked up a welcome knave of spades) when we heard a terrible scream—it split the air as we threw down our cards and ran out on to the deck. Others were running towards the stern of the ship.

There was a deck cargo of barrels and we had to scramble over these, for the narrow passage-way was already crowded with sailors. In the open space beyond the barrels, a colossal white bird was struggling with Lewisohn. It seemed to envelop his little black body. "An albatross! It is too far north for an albatross!" somebody shouted. The chief officer ran forward and as he drew a revolver from his pocket, the great bird dropped Lewisohn on to the deck and rose up above the ship.

The officer fired twice—a sailor shouted "Left wing—he falters—you have shot his left wing." But the bird melted into the black heights and we were left with Lewisohn, dead and mutilated, on the deck. "*Wo bleibt der Kapitain?*—*Wo bleibt der Kapitain?*" somebody cried. But Angermann had not appeared. The bird had gouged out Lewisohn's eyes—his face and breast had been pierced again and again—his poor coloured silk handkerchief fluttered in his dead hand.

We carried him into the saloon, while the Chief and the Engineer searched for Angermann. It was half an hour before he came into the saloon, calm, but with a terrible and cold expression in his eyes.

"Lewisohn is dead, sir," said the chief officer, "attacked by a bird—I fired at it, but I didn't bring it down—I think I hit it, though—in the wing."

"I am sorry—I did not hear"—Angermann turned to me

and spoke in English. "I have been mending some things and I cut myself—it is nothing—poor Lewisohn—on his birthday also."

Angermann walked over to the body. The arrogance of his stride could be seen, even in those four short paces. He took his left hand out of his pocket then, and I saw that his wrist and his arm were covered by a white bandage.

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

The Land of Green Ginger

Ancient Lights

THE LAND OF GREEN GINGER

IN his luxurious service flat the elderly Mr. Adam sat before the fire with a frown upon his face, a frown not of anger or annoyance but of perplexity. It was the cosy time between tea and dinner; about his armchair lay scattered a number of opened and unopened letters; he was scanning a brief typewritten note, wondering how he should deal with it, and this wonder was the cause of his frown.

"These newspaper symposiums," he grumbled to himself, "are a nuisance!" His secretary had gone home, taking away with her the dictated chapters of his book, his twentieth novel—his twentieth *successful* novel, he remembered with a smile that momentarily displaced the frown. "How I started," he read the typed sentence before him. "What made me first begin to write?" The frown came back. Thought ran off into the mists of years ago. . . . He remembered quite well what made him first begin to write. "But no one would believe me." . . .

His face grew quite puckered. . . . He finally decided he would dictate in the morning a few commonplace paragraphs, giving facts, of course, yet not this queer incident that had first discovered his gift to himself. It had been due to a shock, this discovery, and a shock, some say, can bring out latent possibilities in the mind hitherto ignored. Circumstances, that is, are necessary for their appearance; unless life produces them, the possibilities remain unknown, inactive.

He remembered the shock in his own case, the queer experience it produced, and the first hint of his imaginative gift that appeared as a result. "But they'd think I was romancing!" His pencil, meanwhile, scribbled a few words on the blank part of the letter. . . .

"It is interesting," he paused a moment to reflect, "how every important detail of the experience was due to something in my mind at the time. All the ingredients were in me.

Something just used them, dramatised them. That's the imaginative gift, I suppose. . . . It shapes the raw material."

He could see it all as though it were yesterday . . . instead of thirty years ago. . . .

The shock, in his case, had been the sudden total loss of the comfortable fortune he had been brought up to expect. The trustee, his guardian, had played ducks and drakes with it, and at twenty, an orphan, just down from Oxford with a prospect of £2,000 a year, he found himself instead with £50, perhaps less. Two details only bear importantly upon the story: his intense bitterness against the swindling guardian, whom he knew personally; and the question of what he could do to earn his living. These two, had he written the truth for the symposium, Mr. Adam would have stressed. For it was with these two, this thought and this feeling burning intensely in his mind, that he had gone for a walk to think things over. . . .

To him, at the age of twenty, the situation seemed intensely tragic; no one in the world before had ever been so overwhelmed by fate; his anger against the psalm-singing guardian was of that bitter kind that could have killed. The young man was stirred to an intense anger and hatred. He could have murdered Mr. Holyoake. The swindler deserved it. And Adam, dwelling upon the years of dishonest speculation that had left him penniless, meant this precisely. Not that he actually wanted to commit murder, but that he realised the possibility lay in him. He still remembered—with a smile to-day—how he finally dismissed the idea from his mind: "What's the use?" he had reflected, bitterly. "Even if I did murder him the State would only murder me in return. I should be hanged. Who murders is murdered in his turn."

In this way the notion was—as he believed—dismissed from his mind.

The other "important detail" concerned his immediate future. What could he do to earn his living? He dwelt upon it with eager concentration. He reviewed a dozen futures: the stage, journalism, the motor trade, then in its infancy; insurance, emigrating—he thought of many fields and callings, but realised he was trained for none. The choice of work of something that he could do, troubled him obsessingly. There were a hundred, a thousand possible futures

open to a fellow, he discovered. It was the choice that he found impossible. At a given moment in anybody's life, he reflected, a number of possible things lie waiting—he can take only one, but the multiple choice is there.

He had been walking for some time, and in a circle apparently, for he now found himself wandering towards the water-front of the ancient port that was his home town. It was after six o'clock on a summer evening, a Saturday, and few people were about. The sunshine fell slanting down the tangle of deserted alley-ways. There was a smell of the sea, of tarred ropes, rigging, fish, and these brought back the idea of emigrating. He thought of a cousin who had just gone to some job or other in China. . . .

One notion chased another; his mind was a seething mass of wild ideas, with bitter, turbulent emotion behind them. Then, glancing up, his eye caught suddenly five little words, whose faded black letters shone in a patch of sunshine on the dull brick wall above his head. They were rather romantic little words, and they snatched at something in his mind. He stood and stared. It was merely the name of the alley, of course, yet thought took a new turn.

A kind of enchantment stole over him, for the words, as the poet puts it, walked up and down in his heart. . . . There rose before him a picture of forgotten days when the old port traded with southern isles, when dark-bearded sailors gabbling foreign tongues thronged these narrow alley-ways, and the high romance of gallant sailing ships was in the air. . . . The five little words were almost a line of poetry.

"The Land of Green Ginger" was what he read.

Mr. Adam, the young one of thirty years ago, paused, his eyes fastened on the faded lettering in the yellow sunlight. Then he started down the twisting alley, whose high walls now housed nothing more romantic than offices of ship-brokers, notaries, typists, packers, and commissioners of oaths, until his eye noted suddenly an exception—an old furniture shop, with its queer wares overflowing on to the narrow pavement. They were a heterogeneous collection apparently. A circular mirror standing on a three-legged pedestal nearly six feet high reflected his figure, as he moved idly towards the shop a few yards lower down. He saw himself reflected, not without satisfaction—his smart flannel

suit, his eye-glass, his straw hat with its Oxford colours. He also saw a bent, thin little old man with a skull-cap on his head standing among the shadows a few feet inside beyond the dingy doorway.

This figure now moved slowly towards him, scenting perhaps a possible customer.

"A fine piece," said the wheezy voice. "A perfect bit of glass, me lord! Cheap, too!" He rubbed his hands, nodding his ancient head in the direction of the article. "It come from Chincey thirty years ago!"

Adam realised that he had been examining his own reflection for some minutes. He entered the shop, as an escape from troubling thoughts more than anything else, and as he did so the old man, bowing and scraping, moved, too, backing away before him. The interior was dark and much larger than the small entrance promised. A single oil-lamp revealed a series of deep, narrow rooms, cluttered up with stuff, among which the bent figure now set down the mirror carefully, for he had carried it in with him.

In the dimness the young man found his own reflection more attractive than before; it was softened, more effective, he decided. The wheezy voice was mentioning a price, rather a trumpery price, considered Mr. Adam, a few shillings only. He did not want to buy it, but anything was better than being alone with his tormenting thoughts, and he went closer to examine it. He bent down, noticing an inscription cut deeply into the dark wood of the framework. It was in Chinese characters. He ran his fingers over them, then looked up to ask:

"*Who looks in me,*" translated the wheezy voice, "*murders—and is murdered.*" And, carrying the mirror with him, the old man retreated a little further into the shadow of the room beyond.

The young man was startled. He felt his body give an imperceptible twitch he was unable to suppress. His mind likewise gave a twitch. Was it uneasiness? It was, at any rate, surprise, while at the same time he was aware that something drew him, so that, almost involuntarily, he found himself following the retreating figure, who now, still carrying the mirror with him, was on the threshold of the next long room. It was the third extension of the premises, and it was considerably darker than the first two rooms. A chilliness

hung in the fusty atmosphere. The place seemed lonely suddenly.

Aware of a faint tremor in him, though not yet of anything more than that, he spoke in a brusque, almost an aggressive voice :

"And what may such rubbish mean?" he inquired, sharply.

"Precisely what it says, me lord," came the wheezy voice, much lower than before. There was an unpleasant hush in it. And there came a look into the face that hardly invited merriment, which was, perhaps, the very reason why Mr. Adam chose the moment for an audible guffaw. It betrayed him, he realised when it was too late. He felt nervous. More of a chuckle than an actual laugh, it sounded unnatural among this piled-up paraphernalia from foreign lands that gave back no single echo. It sounded dead.

"Does it hold good?" Mr. Adam challenged, the tone of his voice again betraying him—to himself at least. For the tremor crept somehow from the body into the sound. "If I buy the thing, for instance, d'you mean to tell me that *I*—that *you* already before me——?"

He could not finish the sentence. A shudder stopped his breath, and the voice died on his lips. While speaking he had been looking, not into the old man's face, but into the mirror, where he still saw his own reflection. But it was not this that stopped his speech, and froze his blood. It was something else he saw. With one wrinkled hand the old shopman still clutched the pedestal; in the other was an unsheathed knife.

"So far, me lord, it has held good," came his whisper down the long, dim room, and as he spoke he tilted the mirror to a slightly different angle. The young man saw himself in the glass as before, but he now saw something else behind him, too. It lay stretched upon the floor, motionless, crumpled dreadfully, its position not quite natural. One arm was twisted about the face at an angle not possible to life. In the narrow fairway of the room behind him, the room he had already passed, this pitiful, repulsive body lay. To stand where he now stood, the young man realised, he must actually have stepped over it.

"*You*—did—that?" he gasped, in a voice that emitted hardly any sound.

"He looked in the mirror," came the whispered answer. "What do you expect?"

"And before that—*he* in turn——?"

"It works that way." The other gave with an awful grin, Adam felt his body stiffen: yet the blood began to flow in tumult. He felt his fists clench tightly. With his eyes fixed on the shopman and not leaving him for a single instant, he saw that the old man, letting go of the mirror, had begun to dodge. Light-footed he was, amazingly agile, quick, his movements convulsive, horribly alert. He dodged sideways, backwards, swift as a shadow round his customer, who watched the hideous dance with arrested muscles and with spellbound eyes. The knife gleamed and flashed.

Adam made an effort that seemed to wrench his heart—and the muscles began to function again. Instinctively he picked up a heavy iron mace from a teak-wood table close beside him. With a strain he could just lift it.

"It's up to *me* then now—is it?" he cried, his own feet shifting quickly.

"I can defend meself!" shrieked the shopman, dodging with incredible rapidity. "If *that's* any good to you, me lord!" he yelled, shooting across the floor as an arrow flies and brandishing his knife.

Moved by a sudden power that surprised himself, the young man leaped towards the pirouetting horror. He made one bound. He swung his heavy mace. The great weapon crashed down upon the ancient skull, driving the cap deep into the split bone. The figure stopped abruptly, uttered a tiny squeak, crumpled, and lay like a great mutilated insect where it fell. It did not move again.

"Murders and *is* murdered!" the other tried to scream, his voice, as in extreme nightmare agony, making no sound upon the air. "I've done *you* in, at any rate. Then it's *my* turn next, is it——?"

He turned swiftly, with the feeling that someone watched him from behind.

A tall figure, sure enough, darkened the distant door into the street, the outline of a stranger who bent a little to examine something that stood upon the pavement just outside.

The young man stared and stared. Though in semi-darkness himself, the outline was clearly defined in the evening light. But was it a stranger? He wore a smart

flannel suit, a straw hat with Oxford colours. As he straightened up, an eye-glass became visible.

Mr. Adam shot round and stared at the crumpled heap upon the floor at his feet. It was *not* the shopman. What he stared down at was a neat flannel suit, a straw hat with Oxford colours.

He shrieked. He raced headlong down the room. He darted at top speed along the next narrow room as well, straight towards the street door, towards the stranger with the tall outline. And this tall outline now came gliding to meet him, very swiftly gliding, silently too, making no sound upon the boarded floor, just as he had seen his own reflected image gliding towards himself in the mirror before. Closer it came and closer, something oddly, dreadfully familiar about it, something that he almost recognised.

It came remorselessly nearer, he could not have stopped it if he tried, while, curiously, he felt that he did not want to, even *must* not, stop it. Like Fate—his own fate—he must meet it; he could not avoid it—because he somehow welcomed it.

He did not pause himself; he even moved faster, till there was but a foot between them. Terrified he was, yet at the same time his courage rose. They met, they slipped into one another, they emerged, and instantaneously though this came about, he had time to recognise—himself . . . and that same second to find himself standing on the pavement outside, gazing at a mirror on a high three-legged pedestal, while a little, thin, bent old man faced him, wearing a skull-cap and rubbing his hands. It was the shopman evidently, scenting a possible customer.

"A fine piece," the old man wheezed. His eyes pierced like gimlets. "And cheap, too. It come from Chiney thirty year ago."

A wave of pleasant, even delightful, emotion fluttered through the young man's heart, as he bent to read an inscription carved in Chinese characters upon the wooden frame. He ran his finger over them, then looked up to ask.

"*To each,*" the wheezy voice translated, "*ten thousand futures. Yet each must choose,*" and went on to explain how a learned gentleman had once kindly deciphered the words for him—only the young man was no longer listening. He was staring intently at the upper part of the frame.

"But—the frame's empty!" he cried aloud. "There is no mirror!" And again that marvellous emotion passed fluttering across his heart.

"It got broke," he heard the wheezy voice explaining; "got broke on the vige over. But it's easy put in again, me lord. A fine old piece." He mentioned a trumpery price, a few shillings merely.

Young Mr. Adam bought it and took it home with him. . . . In due course he entered his cousin's insurance office as a clerk, and one evening he scribbled an account of his adventure in the Land of Green Ginger. Later, he wrote other, longer adventures, too. He had inside him, it seems, some queer gift of scribbling imaginary, possibly imaginative, adventures. . . . A shock had brought it to the surface.

Next morning the elderly Mr. Adam dictated to his secretary a few commonplace paragraphs about "How I started to write." They began: "At the age of twenty I entered an insurance office as a clerk. . . ." They were extremely dull. "Send it to the editor," he told his secretary, "with a line to say I hope it is what he wants; he need not use it otherwise, of course."

And as he dictated the paragraphs his eye wandered from a long shelf, holding some twenty adventure books, to a mirror on a high three-legged pedestal which, oddly, had no glass, and which, the elderly Mr. Adam knew, had never had one, nor ever would.

ANCIENT LIGHTS

FROM Southwater, where he left the train, the road led due west. That he knew; for the rest he trusted to luck, being one of those born walkers who dislike asking the way. He had that instinct, and as a rule it served him well.

"A mile or so due west along the sandy road till you come to a stile on the right; then across the fields. You'll see the red house straight before you." He glanced at the postcard's instructions once again, and once again he tried to decipher the scratched-out sentence—without success. It had been so elaborately inked over that no word was legible. Inked-out sentences in a letter were always enticing. He wondered what it was that had to be so very carefully obliterated.

The afternoon was boisterous, with a tearing, shouting wind that blew from the sea, across the Sussex weald. Massive clouds with rounded, piled-up edges, cannoned across gaping spaces of blue sky. Far away the line of Downs swept the horizon, like an arriving wave. Chanctonbury Ring rode their crest—a scudding ship, hull down before the wind.

He took his hat off and walked rapidly, breathing great draughts of air with delight and exhilaration. The road was deserted; no horsemen, bicycles, or motors; not even a tradesman's cart; no single walker. But anyhow he would never have asked the way.

Keeping a sharp eye for the stile, he pounded along, while the wind tossed the cloak against his face and made waves across the blue puddles in the yellow road. The trees showed their under leaves of white. The bracken and the high new grass bent all one way. Great life was in the day, high spirits and dancing everywhere. And for a Croydon surveyor's clerk just out of an office this was like a holiday at the sea.

It was a day for high adventure, and his heart rose up to

meet the mood of nature. His umbrella with the silver ring ought to have been a sword, and his brown shoes should have been top-boots with spurs upon the heels. Where hid the enchanted castle and the princess with the hair of sunny gold? His horse. . . .

The stile came suddenly into view and nipped adventure in the bud. Everyday clothes took him prisoner again. He was a surveyor's clerk, middle-aged, earning three pounds a week, coming from Croydon to see about a client's proposed alterations in a wood—something to ensure a better view from the dining-room window. Across the fields, perhaps a mile away, he saw the red house gleaming in the sunshine; and resting on the stile a moment to get his breath he noticed a copse of oak and hornbeam on the right.

"Aha," he told himself, "so that must be the wood he wants to cut down to improve the view. I'll have a look at it." There were boards up, of course, but there was an inviting little path as well. "I'm *not* a trespasser," he said; "it's part of my business, this is." He scrambled awkwardly over the gate and entered the copse. A little round would bring him to the field again.

But the moment he passed among the trees the wind ceased shouting and a stillness dropped upon the world. So dense was the growth that the sunshine came through only in isolated patches. The air was close. He mopped his forehead and put his green felt hat on, but a low branch knocked it off again at once, and as he stooped an elastic twig swung back and stung his face.

There were flowers along both edges of the little path; glades opened on either side; ferns curved about in damp corners, and the smell of earth and foliage was rich and sweet. It was cooler here. What an enchanting little wood, he thought, turning down a small, green glade, where the sunshine flickered like silver wings. How it danced and fluttered and moved about! He put a dark blue flower in his buttonhole.

Again his hat, caught by an oak branch as he rose, was knocked from his head, falling across his eyes. And this time he did not put it on again. Swinging his umbrella he walked on with uncovered head, whistling rather loudly as he went. But the thickness of the trees hardly encouraged whistling, and something of his gaiety and high spirits seemed

to leave him. He suddenly found himself treading circum-spectly and with caution. The stillness in the wood was so peculiar.

There was a rustle among the ferns and leaves and something shot across the path ten yards ahead, stopped abruptly an instant with head cocked sideways to stare, then dived again beneath the underbrush with the speed of a shadow. He started like a frightened child, laughing the next second that a mere pheasant could have made him jump.

In the distance he heard wheels upon the road, and wondered why the sound was so pleasant. "Good old butcher's cart," he said to himself—then realised that he was going in the wrong direction and had somehow got turned round. For the road should be behind him, not in front.

And he hurriedly took another narrow glade that lost itself in greenness to the right. "That's my direction, of course," he said; "the trees have mixed me up a bit it seems"—then found himself abruptly by the gate he had first climbed over. He had merely made a circle. Surprise became almost discomfiture then.

And a man, dressed like a gamekeeper in brown green, leaned against the gate, hitting his legs with a switch. "I'm making for Mr. Lumley's farm," explained the walker. "This *is* his wood, I believe"—then stopped dead, because it was no man at all, but merely an effect of light and shade and foliage. He stepped back to reconstruct the singular illusion, but the wind shook the branches roughly here on the edge of the wood and the foliage refused to reconstruct the figure. The leaves all rustled strangely.

And just then the sun went behind a cloud, making the whole wood look otherwise. Yet how the mind could be thus doubly deceived was indeed remarkable, for it almost seemed to him the man had answered, spoken—or was this the shuffling noise the branches made?—and had pointed with his switch to the notice-board upon the nearest tree. The words rang on in his head, but, of course, he had imagined them: "No, it's not his wood. It's ours." And some village wit, moreover, had changed the lettering on the weather-beaten board, for it read quite plainly, "Trespassers will be persecuted."

And while the astonished clerk read the words and chuckled he said to himself, thinking what a tale he'd have to tell his

like a hunted creature he charged full tilt the other way, meeting the wind now in his face.

Good Lord ! The glade behind him had closed up as well ; there was no longer any path at all. Turning round and round like an animal at bay, he searched for an opening, a way of escape, searched frantically, breathlessly, terrified now in his bones. But foliage surrounded him, branches blocked the way ; the trees stood close and still, unshaken by a breath of wind, and the sun dipped that moment behind a great black cloud. The entire wood turned dark and silent. It watched him.

Perhaps it was this final touch of sudden blackness that made him act so foolishly, as though he had really lost his head. At any rate, without pausing to think, he dashed headlong in among the trees again. There was a sensation of being stiflingly surrounded and entangled, and that he *must* break out at all costs—out and away into the open of the blessed fields and air.

He did this ill-considered thing, and apparently charged straight into an oak that deliberately moved into his path to stop him. He saw it shift across a good full yard, and being a measuring man, accustomed to theodolite and chain, he ought to know. He fell, saw stars, and felt a thousand tiny fingers tugging and pulling at his hands and neck and ankles. The stinging nettles, no doubt, were responsible for this. He thought of it later. At the moment it felt diabolically calculated.

But another remarkable illusion was not so easily explained.

For all in a moment, it seemed, the entire wood went sliding past him with a thick deep rustling of leaves and laughter, myriad footsteps, and tiny little active, energetic shapes ; two men in brownly green gave him a mighty hoist—and he opened his eyes to find himself lying in the meadow beside the stile where first his incredible adventure had begun. The wood stood in its usual place and stared down upon him in the sunlight. There was the red house in the distance as before. Above him grinned the weather-beaten notice-board : "Trespassers will be prosecuted."

Dishevelled in mind and body, and a good deal shaken in his official soul, the clerk walked slowly across the fields. But on the way he glanced once more at the postcard of instructions and saw with dull amazement that the inked-out

sentence was quite legible after all beneath the scratches made across it: "There *is* a short cut through the wood—the wood I want cut down—if you care to take it." Only "care" was so badly written it looked more like another word: the "c" was uncommonly like "d."

"That's the copse that spoils my view of the Downs, you see," his client explained to him later, pointing across the fields and referring to the ordnance map beside him. "I want it cut down and a path made so and so." His finger indicated direction on the map. "The Fairy Wood—it's still called, and it's far older than this house. Come now, if you're ready, Mr. Thomas, we might go out and have a look at it . . ."

ARTHUR MORRISON

The Thing in the Upper Room

THE THING IN THE UPPER ROOM

A SHADOW hung ever over the door, which stood black in the depth of its arched recess, like an unfathomable eye under a frowning brow. The landing was wide and panelled, and a heavy rail, supported by a carved balustrade, stretched away in alternate slopes and levels down the dark staircase, past other doors, and so to the courtyard and the street. The other doors were dark also ; but it was with a difference. That top landing was lightest of all, because of the skylight ; and perhaps it was largely by reason of contrast that its one doorway gloomed so black and forbidding. The doors below opened and shut, slammed, stood ajar. Men and women passed in and out, with talk and human sounds—sometimes even with laughter or a snatch of song ; but the door on the top landing remained shut and silent through weeks and months. For, in truth, the *logement* had an ill name, and had been untenanted for years. Long even before the last tenant had occupied it, the room had been regarded with fear and aversion, and the end of that last tenant had in no way lightened the gloom that hung about the place.

The house was so old that its weather-washed face may well have looked down on the bloodshed of St. Bartholomew's, and the haunted room may even have earned its ill name on that same day of death. But Paris is a city of cruel history, and since the old mansion rose proud and new, the *hôtel* of some powerful noble, almost any year of the centuries might have seen the blot fall on that upper room that had left it a place of loathing and shadows. The occasion was long forgotten, but the fact remained ; whether or not some horror of the *ancien régime* or some enormity of the Terror was enacted in that room was no longer to be discovered ; but nobody would live there, nor stay beyond that gloomy door one second longer than he could help. It might be

supposed that the fate of the solitary tenant within living memory had something to do with the matter—and, indeed, his end was sinister enough; but long before his time the room had stood shunned and empty. He, greatly daring, had taken no more heed of the common terror of the room than to use it to his advantage in abating the rent; and he had shot himself a little later, while the police were beating at his door to arrest him on a charge of murder. As I have said, his fate may have added to the general aversion from the place, though it had in no way originated it; and now ten years had passed, and more, since his few articles of furniture had been carried away and sold; and nothing had been carried in to replace them.

When one is twenty-five, healthy, hungry and poor, one is less likely to be frightened from a cheap lodging by mere headshakings than might be expected in other circumstances. Attwater was twenty-five, commonly healthy, often hungry, and always poor. He came to live in Paris because, from his remembrance of his student days, he believed he could live cheaper there than in London; while it was quite certain that he would not sell fewer pictures, since he had never yet sold one.

It was the *concierge* of a neighbouring house who showed Attwater the room. The house of the room itself maintained no such functionary, though its main door stood open day and night. The man said little, but his surprise at Attwater's application was plain to see. Monsieur was English? Yes. The *logement* was convenient, though high, and probably now a little dirty, since it had not been occupied recently. Plainly, the man felt it to be no business of his to enlighten an unsuspecting foreigner as to the reputation of the place; and if he could let it there would be some small gratification from the landlord, though, at such a rent, of course a very small one indeed.

But Attwater was better informed than the *concierge* supposed. He had heard the tale of the haunted room, vaguely and incoherently, it is true, from the little old engraver of watches on the floor below, by whom he had been directed to the *concierge*. The old man had been voluble and friendly, and reported that the room had a good light, facing north-east—indeed, a much better light than he, engraver of watches,

enjoyed on the floor below. So much so that, considering this advantage and the much lower rent, he himself would have taken the room long ago, except—well, except for other things. Monsieur was a stranger, and perhaps had no fear to inhabit a haunted chamber ; but that was its reputation, as everybody in the quarter knew ; it would be a misfortune, however, to a stranger to take the room without suspicion, and to undergo unexpected experiences. Here, however, the old man checked himself, possibly reflecting that too much information to inquirers after the upper room might offend his landlord. He hinted as much, in fact, hoping that his friendly warning would not be allowed to travel farther. As to the precise nature of the disagreeable manifestations in the room, who could say ? Perhaps there were really none at all. People said this and that. Certainly, the place had been untenanted for many years, and he would not like to stay in it himself. But it might be the good fortune of monsieur to break the spell, and if monsieur was resolved to defy the *revenant*, he wished monsieur the highest success and happiness.

So much for the engraver of watches ; and now the *concierge* of the neighbouring house led the way up the stately old panelled staircase, swinging his keys in his hand, and halted at last before the dark door in the frowning recess. He turned the key with some difficulty, pushed open the door, and stood back with an action of something not wholly deference, to allow Attwater to enter first.

A sort of small lobby had been partitioned off at some time, though except for this the *logement* was of one large room only. There was something unpleasant in the air of the place—not a smell, when one came to analyse one's sensations, though at first it might seem so. Attwater walked across to the wide window and threw it open. The chimneys and roofs of many houses of all ages straggled before him, and out of the welter rose the twin towers of St. Sulpice, scarred and grim.

Air the room as one might, it was unpleasant ; a sickly, even a cowed, feeling, invaded one through all the senses—or perhaps through none of them. The feeling was there, though it was not easy to say by what channel it penetrated. Attwater was resolved to admit none but a common-sense explanation, and blamed the long closing of door and window ;

and the *concierge*, standing uneasily near the door, agreed that that must be it. For a moment Attwater wavered, despite himself. But the rent was very low, and, low, as it was, he could not afford a sou more. The light was good, though it was not a top-light, and the place was big enough for his simple requirements. Attwater reflected that he should despise himself ever after if he shrank from the opportunity ; it would be one of those secret humiliations that will rise again and again in a man's memory, and make him blush in solitude. He told the *concierge* to leave door and window wide open for the rest of the day, and he clinched the bargain.

It was with something of amused bravado that he reported to his few friends in Paris his acquisition of a haunted room ; for, once out of the place, he readily convinced himself that his disgust and dislike while in the room were the result of imagination and nothing more. Certainly, there was no rational reason to account for the unpleasantness ; consequently, what could it be but a matter of fancy ? He resolved to face the matter from the beginning, and clear his mind from any foolish prejudices that the hints of the old engraver might have inspired, by forcing himself through whatever adventures he might encounter. In fact, as he walked the streets about his business, and arranged for the purchase and delivery of the few simple articles of furniture that would be necessary, his enterprise assumed the guise of a pleasing adventure. He remembered that he had made an attempt, only a year or two ago, to spend a night in a house reputed haunted in England, but had failed to find the landlord. Here was the adventure to hand, with promise of a tale to tell in future times ; and a welcome idea struck him that he might look out the ancient history of the room, and work the whole thing into a magazine article, which would bring a little money.

So simple were his needs that by the afternoon of the day following his first examination of the room it was ready for use.

He took his bag from the cheap hotel in a little street of Montparnasse, where he had been lodging, and carried it to his new home. The key was now in his pocket, and for the first time he entered the place alone. The window remained wide open ; but it was still there—that depressing, choking something that entered the consciousness he knew not by

what gate. Again he accused his fancy. He stamped and whistled, and set about unpacking a few canvases and a case of old oriental weapons that were part of his professional properties. But he could give no proper attention to the work, and detected himself more than once yielding to a childish impulse to look over his shoulder. He laughed at himself—with some effort—and sat determinedly to smoke a pipe, and grow used to his surroundings. But presently he found himself pushing his chair farther and farther back, till it touched the wall. He would take the whole room into view, he said to himself in excuse, and stare it out of countenance. So he sat and smoked, and as he sat his eye fell on a Malay dagger that lay on the table between him and the window. It was a murderous, twisted thing, and its pommel was fashioned into the semblance of a bird's head, with curved beak and an eye of some dull red stone. He found himself gazing on this red eye with an odd, mindless fascination. The dagger in its wicked curves seemed now a creature of some outlandish fantasy—a snake with a beaked head, a thing of nightmare, in some new way dominant, overruling the centre of his perceptions. 'The rest of the room grew dim, but the red stone glowed with a fuller light; nothing more was present to his consciousness. Then, with a sudden clang, the heavy bell of St. Sulpice aroused him, and he started up in some surprise.

There lay the dagger on the table, strange and murderous enough, but merely as he had always known it. He observed with more surprise, however, that his chair, which had been back against the wall, was now some six feet forward, close by the table; clearly, he must have drawn it forward in his abstraction, towards the dagger on which his eyes had been fixed. . . . The great bell of St. Sulpice went clanging on, repeating its monotonous call to the Angelus.

He was cold, almost shivering. He flung the dagger into a drawer, and turned to go out. He saw by his watch that it was later than he had supposed; his fit of abstraction must have lasted some time. Perhaps he had even been dozing.

He went slowly downstairs and out into the streets. As he went he grew more and more ashamed of himself, for he had to confess that in some inexplicable way he feared that room. He had seen nothing, heard nothing of the kind that one might have expected, or had heard of in any room

reputed haunted ; he could not help thinking that it would have been some sort of relief if he had. But there was an all-pervading, overpowering sense of another Presence—something abhorrent, not human, something almost physically nauseous. Withal it was something more than presence ; it was power, domination—so he seemed to remember it. And yet the remembrance grew weaker as he walked in the gathering dusk ; he thought of a story he had once read of a haunted house wherein it was shown that the house actually was haunted—by the spirit of fear, and nothing else. That, he persuaded himself, was the case with his room ; he felt angry at the growing conviction that he had allowed himself to be overborne by fancy—by the spirit of fear.

He returned that night with the resolve to allow himself no foolish indulgence. He had heard nothing and had seen nothing ; when something palpable to the senses occurred, it would be time enough to deal with it. He took off his clothes and got into bed deliberately, leaving candle and matches at hand in case of need. He had expected to find some difficulty in sleeping, or at least some delay, but he was scarce well in bed ere he fell into a heavy sleep.

Dazzling sunlight through the window woke him in the morning, and he sat up, staring sleepily about him. He must have slept like a log. But he had been dreaming ; the dreams were horrible. His head ached beyond anything he had experienced before, and he was far more tired than when he went to bed. He sank back on the pillow, but the mere contact made his head ring with pain. He got out of bed, and found himself staggering ; it was all as though he had been drunk—unspeakably drunk with bad liquor. His dreams—they had been horrid dreams ; he could remember that they had been bad, but what they actually were was now gone from him entirely. He rubbed his eyes and stared amazedly down at the table : where the crooked dagger lay, with its bird's head and red stone eye. It lay just as it had lain when he sat gazing at it yesterday, and yet he would have sworn that he had flung that same dagger into a drawer. Perhaps he had dreamed it ; at any rate, he put the thing carefully into the drawer now, and, still with his ringing headache, dressed himself and went out.

As he reached the next landing the old engraver greeted

him from his door with an inquiring good-day. "Monsieur has not slept well, I fear?"

In some doubt, Attwater protested that he had slept quite soundly. "And as yet I have neither seen nor heard anything of the ghost," he added.

"Nothing?" replied the old man, with a lift of the eyebrows, "nothing at all? It is fortunate. It seemed to me, here below, that monsieur was moving about very restlessly in the night; but no doubt I was mistaken. No doubt, also, I may felicitate monsieur on breaking the evil tradition. We shall hear no more of it; monsieur has the good fortune of a brave heart."

He smiled and bowed pleasantly, but it was with something of a puzzled look that his eyes followed Attwater descending the staircase.

Attwater took his coffee and roll after an hour's walk, and fell asleep in his seat. Not for long, however, and presently he rose and left the café. He felt better, though still unaccountably fatigued. He caught sight of his face in a mirror beside a shop window, and saw an improvement since he had looked in his own glass. That indeed had brought him a shock. Worn and drawn beyond what might have been expected of so bad a night, there was even something more. What was it? How should it remind him of that old legend—was it Japanese?—which he had tried to recollect when he had wondered confusedly at the haggard apparition that confronted him? Some tale of a demon-possessed person who in any mirror, saw never his own face, but the face of the demon.

Work he felt to be impossible, and he spent the day on garden seats, at café tables, and for a while in the Luxembourg. And in the evening he met an English friend, who took him by the shoulders and looked into his eyes, shook him, and declared that he had been overworking, and needed, above all things, a good dinner, which he should have instantly. "You'll dine with me," he said, "at La Perouse, and we'll get a cab to take us there. I'm hungry."

As they stood and looked for a passing cab a man ran shouting with newspapers. "We'll have a cab," Attwater's friend repeated, "and we'll take the new murder with us for conversation's sake. Hi! *Journal!*"

He bought a paper, and followed Attwater into the cab.

"I've a strong idea I knew the poor old boy by sight," he said. "I believe he'd seen better days."

"Who?"

"The old man who was murdered in the Rue Broca last night. The description fits exactly. He used to hang about the cafés and run messages. It isn't easy to read in this cab; but there's probably nothing fresh in this edition. They haven't caught the murderer, anyhow."

Attwater took the paper, and struggled to read it in the changing light. A poor old man had been found dead on the footpath of the Rue Broca, torn with a score of stabs. He had been identified—an old man not known to have a friend in the world; also, because he was so old and so poor, probably not an enemy. There was no robbery; the few sous the old man possessed remained in his pocket. He must have been attacked on his way home in the early hours of the morning, possibly by a homicidal maniac, and stabbed again and again with inconceivable fury. No arrest had been made.

Attwater pushed the paper away: "Pah!" he said; "I don't like it. I'm a bit off colour, and I was dreaming horribly all last night; though why this should remind me of it I can't guess. But it's no cure for the blues, this!"

"No," replied his friend heartily; "we'll get that upstairs, for here we are, on the quay. A bottle of the best Burgundy on the list and the best dinner they can do—that's your physic. Come!"

It was a good prescription, indeed. Attwater's friend was cheerful and assiduous, and nothing could have bettered the dinner. Attwater found himself reflecting that indulgence in the blues was a poor pastime, with no better excuse than a *bad night's rest*. And last night's dinner in comparison with this! Well, it was enough to have spoiled his sleep, that one-franc-fifty dinner.

Attwater left La Perouse as gay as his friend. They had sat late, and now there was nothing to do but cross the water and walk a little in the boulevards. This they did, and finished the evening at a café table with half a dozen acquaintances.

Attwater walked home with a light step, feeling less drowsy than at any time during the day. He was well enough. He felt he should soon get used to the room. He had been

a little too much alone lately, and that had got on his nerves. It was simply stupid.

Again he slept quickly and heavily—and dreamed. But he had an awakening of another sort. No bright sun blazed in at the open window to lift his heavy lids, and no morning bell from St. Sulpice opened his ears to the cheerful noise of the city. He awoke gasping and staring in the dark, rolling face-downward on the floor, catching his breath in agonized sobs; while through the window from the streets came a clamour of hoarse cries: cries of pursuit and the noise of running men: a shouting and clatter wherein here and there a voice was clear among the rest—“*A l'assassin! Arrêtez!*”

He dragged himself to his feet in the dark, gasping still. What was this—all this? Again a dream? His legs trembled under him, and he sweated with fear. He made for the window, panting and feeble; and then, as he supported himself by the sill, he realized wonderingly that he was fully dressed—that he wore even his hat. The running crowd straggled through the outer street and away, the shouts growing fainter. What had wakened him? Why had he dressed? He remembered his matches, and turned to grope for them; but something was already in his hand—something wet, sticky. He dropped it on the table, and even as he struck the light, before he saw it, he knew. The match sputtered and flared, and there on the table lay the crooked dagger, smeared and dripping and horrible.

Blood was on his hands—the match stuck in his fingers. Caught at the heart by the first grip of an awful surmise, he looked up and saw in the mirror before him, in the last flare of the match, the face of the Thing in the Room.

ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

A Pair of Hands

A PAIR OF HANDS

"YES," said Miss Le Petyt, gazing into the deep fireplace and letting her hands and her knitting lie idle for the moment in her lap. "Oh, yes, I have seen a ghost. In fact, I have lived in a house with one for quite a long time."

"How you could——" began one of my host's daughters; and "You, Aunt Emily?" cried the other at the same moment.

Miss Le Petyt, gentle soul, withdrew her eyes from the fireplace and protested with a gay little smile. "Well, my dears, I am not quite the coward you take me for. And, as it happens, mine was the most harmless ghost in the world. In fact,"—and here she looked at the fire again—"I was quite sorry to lose her."

"It was a woman, then? Now, I think," said Miss Blanche, "that female ghosts are the horriddest of all. They wear little shoes with high red heels, and go about tap, tap, wringing their hands."

"This one wrung her hands, certainly. But I don't know about the high red heels, for I never saw her feet. Perhaps she was like the Queen of Spain, and hadn't any. And as for the hands, it all depends how you wring them. There's an elderly shopwalker at Knightsbridge, for instance——"

"Don't be prosy, dear, when you know that we're just dying to hear the story."

Miss Le Petyt turned to me with a small deprecating laugh. "It's such a little one."

"The story or the ghost?"

"Both."

And this was Miss Le Petyt's story:

"It happened when I lived down in Cornwall, at Tresillack, on the south coast. Tresillack was the name of the house, which stood quite alone at the head of a coombe, within sound of the sea but without sight of it; for though the

coombe led down to a wide open beach it wound and twisted half a dozen times on its way, and its overlapping sides closed the view from the house, which was advertised as 'secluded.' I was very poor in those days. Your father and all of us were poor then, as I trust, my dears, you will never be; but I was young enough to be romantic and wise enough to like independence, and this word 'secluded' took my fancy.

"The misfortune was that it had taken the fancy, or just suited the requirements, of several previous tenants. You know, I dare say, the kind of person who rents a secluded house in the country? Well, yes, there are several kinds; but they seem to agree in being odious. No one knows where they come from, though they soon remove all doubt about where they're 'going to,' as the children say. 'Shady' is the word, is it not? Well, the previous tenants of Tresillack (from first to last a bewildering series) had been shady with a vengeance.

"I knew nothing of this when I first made application to the landlord, a solid yeoman inhabiting a farm at the foot of the coombe, on a cliff overlooking the beach.

"To him I presented myself fearlessly as a spinster of decent family and small but assured income, intending a rural life of combined seemliness and economy. He met my advances politely enough, but with an air of suspicion which offended me. I began by disliking him for it; afterwards I set it down as an unpleasant feature in the local character. I was doubly mistaken. Farmer Hosking was slow-witted, but as honest a man as ever stood up against hard times; and a more open and hospitable race than the people on that coast I never wish to meet. It was the caution of a child who had burnt his fingers, not once but many times. Had I known what I afterwards learned of Farmer Hosking's tribulations as landlord of a 'secluded country residence,' I should have approached him with the bashfulness proper to my suit and faltered as I undertook to prove the bright exception in a long line of painful experiences. He had bought the Tresillack estate twenty years before—on mortgage, I fancy—because the land adjoined his own and would pay him for tillage. But the house was a nuisance, an incubus; and had been so from the beginning.

"'Well, miss,' he said, 'you're welcome to look over it;

a pretty enough place, inside and out. There's no trouble about keys, because I've put in a housekeeper, a widow-woman, and she'll show you round. With your leave I'll step up the coombe so far with you, and put you in your way.' As I thanked him he paused and rubbed his chin. 'There's one thing I must tell you, though. Whoever takes the house must take Mrs. Carkeek along with it.'

" 'Mrs. Carkeek?' I echoed dolefully. 'Is that the housekeeper?'

" 'Yes; she was wife to my late hind. I'm sorry, miss,' he added, my face telling him no doubt what sort of woman I expected Mrs. Carkeek to be; 'but I had to make it a rule after—after some things that happened. And I dare say you won't find her so bad. Mary Carkeek's a sensible, comfortable woman, and knows the place. She was in service there to Squire Kendall when he sold up and went: her first place it was.'

" 'I may as well see the house, anyhow,' said I dejectedly. So we started to walk up the coombe. The path, which ran beside a little chattering stream, was narrow for the most part, and Farmer Hosking, with an apology, strode on ahead to beat aside the brambles. But whenever its width allowed us to walk side by side I caught him from time to time stealing a shy inquisitive glance under his rough eyebrows. Courteously though he bore himself, it was clear that he could not sum me up to his satisfaction or bring me square with his notion of a tenant of his 'secluded country residence.'

" 'I don't know what foolish fancy prompted it, but about half-way up the coombe I stopped short and asked:

" 'There are no ghosts, I suppose?'

" 'It struck me, a moment after I had uttered it, as a supremely silly question; but he took it quite seriously. 'No: I never heard tell of any ghosts.' He laid a queer sort of stress on the word. 'There's always been trouble with servants, and maids' tongues will be runnin'. But Mary Carkeek lives up there alone, and she seems comfortable enough.'

" 'We walked on. By and by he pointed with his stick. 'It don't look like a place for ghosts, now, do it?'

" 'Certainly it did not. Above an untrimmed orchard rose a terrace of turf scattered with thorn bushes, and above this a terrace of stone, upon which stood the prettiest cottage I had ever seen. It was long and low and thatched; a deep

verandah ran from end to end. Clematis, banksia roses and honeysuckle climbed the posts of this verandah, and big blooms of Marechal Niel were clustered along its roof, beneath the lattices of the bedroom windows. The house was small enough to be called a cottage, and rare enough in features and in situation to confer distinction on any tenant. It suggested what in those days we should have called 'elegant' living. And I could have clapped my hands for joy.

"My spirits mounted still higher when Mrs. Carkeek opened the door to us. I had looked for a Mrs. Gummidge, and I found a healthy middle-aged woman with a thoughtful, but contented, face, and a smile which, without a trace of obsequiousness, quite bore out the farmer's description of her. She was a comfortable woman; and while we walked through the rooms together (for Mr. Hosking waited outside) I 'took to' Mrs. Carkeek. Her speech was direct and practical; the rooms, in spite of their faded furniture, were bright and exquisitely clean; and somehow the very atmosphere of the house gave me a sense of well-being, of feeling at home and cared for; yes, of being loved. Don't laugh, my dears; for when I've done you may not think this fancy altogether foolish.

"I stepped out into the verandah, and Farmer Hosking pocketed the pruning-knife which he had been using on a bush of jasmine.

" 'This is better than anything I had dreamed of,' said I.

" 'Well, miss, that's not a wise way of beginning a bargain, if you'll excuse me.'

"He took no advantage, however, of my admission; and we struck the bargain as we returned down the coombe to his farm, where the hired chaise waited to convey me back to the market town. I had meant to engage a maid of my own, but now it occurred to me that I might do very well with Mrs. Carkeek. This, too, was sealed in the course of the next day or two, and within the week I have moved into my new home.

"I can hardly describe to you the happiness of my first month at Tresillack, because (as I now believe) if I take the reasons which I had for being happy, one by one, there remains over something which I cannot account for. I was moderately young, entirely healthy; I felt myself independent

and adventurous ; the season was high summer, the weather glorious, the garden in all the pomp of June, yet sufficiently unkempt to keep me busy, give me a sharp appetite for meals, and send me to bed in that drowsy stupor which comes of the odours of earth. I spent the most of my time out of doors, winding up the day's work as a rule with a walk down the cool valley, along the beach and back.

"I soon found that all housework could be safely left to Mrs. Carkeek. She did not talk much ; indeed, her only fault (a rare one in housekeepers) was that she talked too little, and even when I addressed her seemed at times unable to give me her attention. It was as though her mind strayed off to some small job she had forgotten, and her eyes wore a listening look, as though she waited for the neglected task to speak and remind her. But, as a matter of fact, she forgot nothing. Indeed, my dears, I was never so well attended to in my life.

"Well, that is what I'm coming to. That, so to say, is just it. The woman not only had the rooms swept and dusted and my meals prepared to the moment.

"In a hundred odd little ways this orderliness, these preparations, seemed to read my desires. Did I wish the roses renewed in a bowl upon the dining-table, sure enough at the next meal they would be replaced by fresh ones. Mrs. Carkeek (I told myself) must have surprised and interpreted a glance of mine. And yet I could not remember having glanced at the bowl in her presence. And how on earth had she guessed the very roses, the very shapes and colours I had lightly wished for ? This is only an instance, you understand ? Every day, and from morning to night, I happened on others, each slight enough, but all together bearing witness to a ministering intelligence as subtle as it was untiring.

"I am a light sleeper, as you know, with an uncomfortable knack of waking with the sun and roaming early. No matter how early I rose at Tresillack, Mrs. Carkeek seemed to have preceded me. Finally I had to conclude that she arose and dusted and tidied as soon as she judged me safely a-bed. For once, finding the drawing-room (where I had been sitting late) 'redded up' at four in the morning, and no trace of a plate of raspberries which I had carried thither after dinner and left overnight, I determined to test her,

and walked through to the kitchen, calling her by name.

"I found the kitchen as clean as a pin, and the fire laid, but no trace of Mrs. Carkeek. I walked upstairs and knocked at her door. At the second knock, a sleepy voice cried out, and presently the good woman stood before me in her nightgown, looking (I thought) very badly scared.

"'No,' I said, 'it's not a burglar. But I've found out what I wanted, that you do your morning's work overnight. But you mustn't wait for me when I choose to sit up. And now go back to your bed like a good soul, whilst I take a run down to the beach.'

"She stood blinking in the dawn. Her face was still white.

"'O, miss,' she gasped, 'I made sure you must have seen something!'

"'And so I have,' I answered, 'but it was neither burglars nor ghosts.'

"'Thank God!' I heard her say as she turned her back to me in her grey bedroom—which faced the north. And I took this for a carelessly pious expression and ran downstairs thinking no more of it.

"A few days later I began to understand.

"The plan of Tresillack house (I must explain) was simplicity itself. To the left of the hall as you entered was the dining-room; to the right the drawing-room, with a boudoir beyond. The foot of the stairs faced the front door, and beside it, passing a glazed inner door, you found two others right and left, the left opening on the kitchen, the right on a passage which ran by a store cupboard under the bend of the stairs to a neat pantry with the usual shelves and linen-press, and under the window (which faced north) a porcelain basin and brass tap. On the first morning of my tenancy I had visited this pantry and turned the tap, but no water ran. I supposed this to be accidental. Mrs. Carkeek had to wash up glass ware and crockery, and no doubt Mrs. Carkeek would complain of any failure in the water supply.

"But the day after my surprise visit (as I called it) I had picked a basketful of roses, and carried them into the pantry as a handy place to arrange them in. I chose a china bowl and went to fill it at the tap. Again the water would not run.

"I called Mrs. Carkeek. 'What is wrong with this tap?' I asked. 'The rest of the house is well enough supplied.'

"‘I don’t know, miss. I never use it.’

"‘But there must be a reason; and you must find it a great nuisance washing up the plates and glasses in the kitchen. Come around to the back with me, and we’ll have a look at the cisterns.’

"‘The cisterns’ll be all right, miss. I assure you I don’t find it a trouble.’

"But I was not to be put off. The back of the house stood but ten feet from a wall which was really but a stone face built against the cliff cut away by the architect. Above the cliff rose the kitchen garden, and from its lower path we looked over the wall’s parapet upon the cisterns. There were two—a very large one, supplying the kitchen and the bathroom above the kitchen; and a small one, obviously fed by the other, and as obviously leading by a pipe which I could trace, to the pantry. Now the big cistern stood almost full, and yet the small one, though on a lower level was empty.

"‘It’s as plain as daylight,’ said I. ‘The pipe between the two is choked.’ And I clambered on to the parapet.

"‘I wouldn’t, miss. The pantry tap is only cold water, and no use to me. From the kitchen boiler I get it hot, you see.’

"‘But I want the pantry water for my flowers.’ I bent over and groped. ‘I thought as much!’ said I, as I wrenched out a thick plug of cork, and immediately the water began to flow. I turned triumphantly on Mrs. Carkeek, who had grown suddenly red in the face. Her eyes were fixed on the cork in my hand. To keep it more firmly wedged in its place somebody had wrapped it round with a rag of calico print; and discoloured though the rag was, I seemed to recall the pattern (a lilac sprig). Then, as our eyes met, it occurred to me that only two mornings before Mrs. Carkeek had worn a print gown of that same sprigged pattern.

"I had the presence of mind to hide this very small discovery, sliding over it some quite trivial remark; and presently Mrs. Carkeek regained her composure. But I own I felt disappointed in her. It seemed such a paltry thing to be disingenuous over. She had deliberately acted a fib before me; and why? Merely because she preferred the kitchen to the pantry tap. It was childish. ‘But servants are all the same,’ I told myself. ‘I must take Mrs. Carkeek as she is; and, after all, she is a treasure.’

"On the second night after this, and between eleven and twelve o'clock, I was lying in bed and reading myself sleepy over a novel of Lord Lytton's, when a small sound disturbed me. I listened. The sound was clearly that of water trickling, and I set it down to rain. A shower (I told myself) had filled the water-pipes which drained the roof. Somehow I could not fix the sound. There was a water pipe against the wall just outside my window. I rose and drew up the blind.

"To my astonishment no rain was falling; no rain had fallen. I felt the slate window-sill; some dew had gathered there—no more. There was no wind, no cloud; only a still moon high over the eastern slope of the coombe, the distant splash of waves, and the fragrance of many roses. I went back to bed and listened again. Yes, the trickling sound continued, quite distinct in the silence of the house, not to be confused for a moment with the dull *rum mur* of the beach. After a while it began to grate on my nerves. I caught up my candle, flung my dressing-gown about me, and *ole* softly downstairs.

"Then it was simple. I traced the sound to the pantry. 'Mrs. Carkeek has left the tap running,' said I: and, sure I found it so—a thin trickle steadily running to waste in the porcelain basin. I turned off the tap, went contentedly back to my bed, and slept—

"—for some hours. I opened my eyes in darkness and at once knew what had awakened me. The tap was running again. Now, it had shut easily in my hand, but not so easily that I could believe it had slipped open again of its own accord. 'This is Mrs. Carkeek's doing,' said I; and I am afraid I added 'Drat Mrs. Carkeek!'

"Well there was no help for it: so I struck a light, looked at my watch, saw that the hour was just three o'clock, and I descended the stairs again. At the pantry door I paused. I was not afraid—not one little bit. In fact the notion that anything might be wrong had never crossed my mind. But I remember thinking, with my hand on the door, that if Mrs. Carkeek were in the pantry I might happen to give her a severe fright.

"I pushed the door open briskly. Mrs. Carkeek was not there. But something was there, by the porcelain basin—something which might have sent me scurrying upstairs two steps at a time, but which as a matter of fact held me to the spot. My heart seemed to stand still—so still! And in the

stillness I remember setting down the brass candlestick on a tall nest of drawers beside me.

"Over the porcelain basin and beneath the water trickling from the tap I saw two hands.

"That was all—two small hands, a child's hands. I cannot tell how they ended.

"No; they were not cut off. I saw them quite distinctly; just a pair of small hands and the wrists, and after that—nothing. They were moving briskly—washing themselves clean. I saw the water trickle and splash over them—not through them—but just as it would on real hands. They were the hands of a little girl, too. Oh, yes, I was sure of that at once. Boys and girls wash their hands differently. I can't just tell you what the difference is, but it's unmistakable.

"I saw all this before my candle slipped and fell with a crash. I had set it down without looking—for my eyes were fixed on the basin—and had balanced it on the edge of the nest of drawers. After the crash, in the darkness there, with the water running, I suffered some bad moments.

"Oddly enough, the thought uppermost with me was that I must shut off that tap before escaping. I had to. And after a while I picked up all my courage, so to say, between my teeth, and with a little sob thrust out my hand and did it. Then I fled.

"The dawn was close upon me: and as soon as the sky reddened I took my bath, dressed and went downstairs. And there at the pantry door I found Mrs. Carkeek, also dressed, with my candlestick in her hand.

"Ah; said I, 'you picked it up.'

"Our eyes met. Clearly Mrs. Carkeek wished me to begin, and I determined at once to have it out with her.

"And you knew all about it. That's what accounts for your plugging up the cistern.'

"You saw . . .?' she began.

"Yes, yes. And you must tell me all about it—never mind how bad. Is—is it—murder?'

"Law bless you, miss, whatever put such horrors in your head?'

"She was washing her hands.'

"Ah, so she does, poor dear! But—murder! And dear little Miss Margaret, that wouldn't go to hurt a fly!'

“ ‘Miss Margaret?’ ”

“ ‘Eh, she died at seven year. Squire Kendall’s only daughter; and that’s over twenty years ago. I was her nurse, miss, and I know—diphtheria it was; she took it down in the village.’ ”

“ ‘But how do you know it is Margaret?’ ”

“ ‘Those hands—why, how could I mistake, that used to be her nurse?’ ”

“ ‘But why does she wash them?’ ”

“ ‘Well, miss, being always a dainty child—and the house-work, you see—’ ”

“ ‘I took a long breath. ‘Do you mean to tell me that all this tidying and dusting—’ I broke off. ‘Is it she who has been taking this care of me?’ ”

“ ‘Mrs. Carkeek met my look steadily.

“ ‘Who else, miss?’ ”

“ ‘Poor little soul!’ ”

“ ‘Well now’—Mrs. Carkeek rubbed my candlestick with the edge of her apron—‘I’m so glad you take it like this. For there isn’t really nothing to be afraid of—is there?’ She eyed me wistfully. ‘It’s my belief she loves you, miss. But only to think what a time she must have had with the others!’ ”

“ ‘Were they bad?’ ”

“ ‘They was awful. Didn’t Farmer Hosking tell you? They carried on fearful—one after another, and each one worse than the last.’ ”

“ ‘What was the matter with them? Drink?’ ”

“ ‘Drink, miss, with some of ’em. There was the Major—he used to go mad with it, and run about the coombe in his nightshirt. Oh, scandalous! And his wife drank too—that is, if she ever was his wife. Just think of that tender child washing up after their nasty doings!’ ”

“ ‘But that wasn’t the worst, miss—not by a long way. There was a pair here—from the colonies, or so they gave out—with two children, a boy and girl, the eldest scarce six. Poor mites!’ ”

“ ‘They beat those children, miss—your blood would boil! and starved, and tortured ’em, it’s my belief. You could hear their screams, I’ve been told, away back in the high-road, and that’s the best part of half a mile.

“ ‘Sometimes they was locked up without food for days

together. But it's my belief that little Miss Margaret managed to feed them somehow. Oh, I can see her creeping to the door and comforting !'

" ' But perhaps she never showed herself when these awful people were here, but took to flight until they left.'

" ' You didn't never know her, miss. The brave she was ! She'd have stood up to lions. She've been here all the while : and only to think what her innocent eyes and ears must have took in ! There was another couple——' Mrs. Carkeek sunk her voice.

" ' Oh, hush !' said I, ' if I'm to have any peace of mind in this house !'

" ' But you won't go, Miss ? She loves you, I know she do. And think what you might be leaving her to—what sort of tenant might come next. For she can't go. She've been here ever since her father sold the place. He died soon after. You mustn't go !'

" Now I had resolved to go, but all of a sudden I felt how mean this resolution was.

" ' After all,' said I ' there's nothing to be afraid of.'

" ' That's it, miss ; nothing at all. I don't even believe it's so very uncommon. Why, I've heard my mother tell of farmhouses where the rooms were swept every night as regular as clockwork, and the floors sanded, and the pots and pans scoured, and all while the maids slept. They put it down to the piskies ; but we know better, miss, and now we've got the secret between us we can lie easy in our beds, and if we hear anything, say " God bless the child !" and go to sleep.'

" I spent three years at Tresillack, and all that while Mrs. Carkeek lived with me and shared the secret. Few women, I dare to say, were ever so completely wrapped around with love as we were during those three years.

" It ran through my waking life like a song : it smoothed my pillow, touched and made my table comely, in summer lifted the heads of the flowers as I passed, and in winter watched the fire with me and kept it bright.

" ' Why did I ever leave Tresillack ?' Because one day, at the end of five years, Farmer Hosking brought me word that he had sold the house—or was about to sell it ; I forget which. There was no avoiding it, at any rate ; the purchaser being a Colonel Kendall, a brother of the old Squire.

“ ‘A married man?’ I asked.

“ ‘Yes, miss; with a family of eight. As pretty children as ever you see, and the mother a good lady. “It’s the old home to Colonel Kendall.”

“ ‘I see. And that is why you feel bound to sell.

“ ‘It’s a good price, too, that he offers. You mustn’t think but I’m sorry enough——’

“ ‘To turn me out? I thank you, Mr. Hosking; but you are doing the right thing.’

“ ‘She—Margaret—will be happy,’ I said; ‘with her cousins, you know.’

“ ‘Oh, yes, miss, she will be happy, sure enough,’ Mrs. Carkeek agreed.

“So when the time came I packed up my boxes and tried to be cheerful. But on the last morning, when they stood corded in the hall, I sent Mrs. Carkeek upstairs upon some poor excuse, and stepped alone into the pantry.

“ ‘Margaret!’ I whispered.

“There was no answer at all. I had scarcely dared to hope for one. Yet I tried again, and, shutting my eyes this time, stretched out both hands and whispered:

“ ‘Margaret!’

“And I will swear to my dying day that two little hands stole and rested—for a moment only—in mine.”

J. C. SQUIRE

Entirely Imaginary

ENTIRELY IMAGINARY

I

“**N**ONE of the characters in this book is based upon any person known to the author”: “the personages in this book are entirely imaginary.” How often, sometimes even with the qualification “in whole or in part,” do we not see such notes as those prefaced to modern novels! They do not always carry conviction, especially when the reader is well acquainted with persons unmistakably portrayed; but even when they are mendacious, they may help to avert libel in palpable cases, or disarm suspicion in more doubtful ones. And, mendacious or not, such announcement of course helps to give the impression that here at least is a really creative story-teller, a novelist who has no need to resort to the tricks of the mere photographer, since he has a brain which teems with lively populations of its own engendering.

Sometimes an author knows that he has copied from life. Sometimes he does not know it. And in one recent instance he had and had not and knew it and did not know. A puzzling remark? But listen!

II

Mr.—but here we are at once up against one of the difficulties in question—what am I going to call the novelist whose tribulations I am about to record? I cannot, for reasons which will presently be plain, give his real name. Were I to call him, say, Aldous Woodhouse, I should obviously be asking for trouble. Yet if I just put down the first name I think of—as it might be, Philip Bliss—how can I be certain that there is not a novelist of that name who will at once suspect innocence? I could, of course, go to the British Museum, and make sure. But if I did, I should probably find that there were several Philip Blisses who wrote novels;

or, if not that, at least a Philip Bliss, a Philip Bless and a Philip Bloss, which would be near enough to be disquieting. Besides, I really could not face a long search of that catalogue in that great musty rotunda of the Reading Room, where you cannot smoke and the smallest biscuit has to be eaten furtively. So I shall chance it, and call him Philip Bliss.

III

Philip Bliss had written three novels. The first was the usual thing: a description of his school and undergraduate days—which was rather melodramatised, but bore some relation to facts—coupled with the account of sundry “adventures,” and a violent amour, which might easily (as he told himself) have actually happened, though, in point of fact, they did not. His second novel written after he had been in London for two years, working in the Civil Service and dining out a little as a presentable and interesting young man, had contained less of autobiography and more of observation, less of hectic dream yet more of true imagination. His third had compelled the critics to admit that here was a coming author. Callowness had gone; no longer was it evident that each character *must* be somebody whom Philip personally and intimately knew or largely conjectured from the newspapers, for types were drawn. Something that promised a general panoramic view of English society, with the nature and weight of all its characteristic constituents clearly appraised, was being approached. *The Daily Lantern* had said: “Here, if we are not mistaken, is a novelist in the making.” *The Weekly Sentinel* had said: “Here, unless our judgment is gravely at fault, is a novelist by vocation.” *The Monthly Review* had said; “Here, though we know the fate that awaits prophets, is a shrewd observer of life whose next book should place him in the very highest class of living English novelists.” Naturally, with such encouragement, Philip Bliss did his level best with his fourth book. He was thirty. He already despised the dreadful crudity of his twenties. “Experience” now came to him in such volumes that he knew he could never catch up with it. He was already on the verge of that pleasant and enlightened period of middle age in which every new person one meets

falls at once into some category of persons already known in life or books, and behaves as we expect him to behave. He would soon be able to create a Cabinet Minister, a coquette, a hostess, a theatre proprietor, a charwoman or a cabman, who would be a clear-cut person and typical, without being deliberately based upon any one person whom Philip had actually met.

Over the fourth novel he took the extra trouble that his sympathetic critics asked him to take. He worked on it—for he had now thrown up the job in the Home Office—sedulously for two years, whether in the Bayswater flat or in the Jimson's cottage near Rye, or in Lady Alberta's villa at Antibes. When he had finished it he was pleased with it. It gave, he flattered himself, such a picture, realistic but not cynical, of London Society fourteen years after the war, as none had yet made; and without a sign of the monomania which makes people think that their own little set is all London. One thing only worried him. He had taken only little bits of actual people for his characters, and felt comfortably assured that neither they nor anybody else would ever know it. How could Georgie ever conceivably guess that one of her house-parties had been the foundation of the great and rather scarifying party in chapter ten, since she had been turned into an old woman, her house from a mediæval manor into a Queen Anne one, her proclivities from Russian and frenzied into eighteenth century and cool? How could Lord Beehive guess that he was the original of the Labour statesman in the book, even though all the elements of his technique of boredom had been analysed, for his appearance and his ancestry had been completely altered, and his passion for sugar beet had been changed into a passion for Communism? No, his reputation as a creator was not in peril; and his models could be trusted to praise the caricatures of themselves without suspicion, and even to suppose that they were all sly digs at others to whom they objected. After all, there were several Labour Peers, who, considered in a dull superficial way, might well be held to resemble his own Labour Peer more closely than that droning Conservative, Beehive; and he could well imagine Beehive, whose mannerisms cried aloud for burlesque, coming up to him at one of those infernal political crushes and whispering: "Ha, ha, my boy, you've got Anthecap to the life; pretty

brutal, pretty brutal!" One thing, nevertheless, worried him. It was this: had he altered just one of the characters quite enough? There was just one man, Simpson, whom he had derived straight from life: a repulsive person who was carrying on two several intrigues with two of his friend's wives—or, at least, so Bliss shrewdly surmised.

This man, with his name changed to Brown, he had made a central character of the new book, and this situation, a central situation. Not only that, but, guessing where he was not sure, and dotting "i's" and crossing "t's" in a way which the facts known to him hardly justified, he undoubtedly added flavour to the book. Here, patently, was a case where identification would be fatal, so he set to work, after finishing his novel, to sink Simpson without trace.

Simpson was fair, pale, clean-shaven, short and thin. The man (Brown) in the book became emphatically dark, ruddy, moustached, tall and bulky. Simpson's voice was a squeak; in the book it became a bellow. Simpson was a man of private means, son of a cotton magnate; as Brown he migrated to the Stock Exchange. Simpson had been to a public school and a University; reincarnate, he had made his own way in the world after a secondary school at Southend. Simpson haunted the Ritz; Brown lunched daily (as did Bliss himself) at the Savoy Grill. Simpson had parents alive; Brown was an orphan. Simpson lived in a Mayfair flat; Brown was transported to a villa at Woking.

Very carefully, when reading his last proofs, Bliss tooth-combed the Simpson-Brown chapters for tell-tale traits; at the end, with a smile of satisfaction, he decided that no human being could conceivably identify Brown as Simpson. The two characters now had nothing in common except general bumptiousness, general unpopularity, and the sordid intrigues. Mr. Bliss was pleased not only at having eliminated all risk of libel, but at having behaved as a gentleman should and avoided all cause of offence.

IV

The book appeared. It was universally praised, especially by those critics whom he knew personally, and by his publisher's reader, a very generous man. The *Daily Lantern*

said : " Mr. Bliss has at last done what we always expected of him ; he has indubitably arrived." The *Weekly Sentinel* observed : " We always knew that Mr. Bliss was capable of a masterpiece ; he has now written it." The *Monthly Review* declared : " At one bound Mr. Bliss steps into the company of the great English novelists." The sales were immense and grew daily ; in many shops, though one window was still entirely filled with the novels of Mr. J. B. Priestley, the other was adorned by equally imposing piles of Bliss, pyramids of Bliss, pagodas of Bliss, solid cardcastles of Bliss. A thousand pounds on account was sent him by his grateful agent, now certain that he would be able, by dint of Bliss's efforts, to keep the couple of racehorses for which he had long hankered ; and Bliss himself began to wonder whether the little house off Regent's Park wasn't rather cramped and Hill Street or Charles Street mightn't really be more comfortably near everything and everybody. After all, he had three thousand in the bank, and the book, if it went really well in America, was bound to bring him in another ten thousand. An agreeable little lease could be purchased ; and in one of those cosy Mayfair cottages his present man and wife could still quite well do for him. How near the club, too ; easy walking distance, a rubber always within reach on lonely evenings, and a tolerable dinner when the servants were out. Alnaschar's tray fell ; the cottage in Mayfair is still a castle in Spain.

V

One morning, a month after the book had first appeared, and while it was still burning its way towards Land's End and John o' Groats like a prairie fire, Bliss was sitting upstairs in his drawing-room-cum-study, trying to work at a play, but really day-dreaming about holidays in the South of France, when his butler appeared, looking very harassed, with the announcement that there was a gentleman wanting to see him.

" Who is he, and what is his business ? " asked Bliss.

The butler, red and perspiring, was obviously in difficulties.

" He said his name was Brown, sir, and that you'd know why he had come."

"But didn't you tell him that I was never in in the mornings, except by appointment?"

"Yes, sir, I did; and he pushed himself in and slammed the door behind him, and . . ."

"Well, Parker, and what?"

"Excuse me, sir, but he said that if I didn't show him up, he'd come up himself . . . and he threatened me, sir."

Bliss had no idea what was up; but his heart, knowing what hearts often know when brains are slow, stood still, and then began painfully throbbing. Creditors, now, he had none; enemies he had striven not to make. Was this a lunatic, or a blackmailer with an awkward, though trumped-up, accusation up his sleeve? He simply couldn't guess. The more cowardly side of him urged him to send the butler down to face the music, and to lock the door; but pride indicated otherwise, and he said:

"Very well, Parker, show him up."

The door opened.

"Mr. Brown," said Parker.

There strode into the room, while the door closed again, an enormous man with a red face, a heavy cavalry moustache, and a body like a great bolster in a dark overcoat. He stopped and glared.

"*Well?*" he said, in a deep, sharp, sneering and rather nasal voice.

"I don't quite know what you mean," replied Bliss, frowning in bewilderment.

"Ho! So you don't know what I mean! I've half a mind to wring your damn little neck for you!"

"I can't conceive what you're talking about," said Bliss, irritably. His right hand moved to the little table beside the fireplace. Yes, there was the stiletto. Normally it was used as a paper-knife, but . . .

"Drop that!" snapped the stranger, whipping a revolver out of his pocket and pointing it at him. The dagger rattled to the floor.

"Now, look here, you dirty little squirt," observed the visitor, striding up to Bliss with outshot under-lip and clenched fists—Bliss retiring until the fireplace prevented further retirement—"What the bloody hell d'you mean by it? That's all I want to know; what the hell d'you think you're up to?"

Bliss looked at him in bewilderment. "I can't imagine what you're talking about," he said; "I've never seen you in my life before. You must be mistaking me for somebody else."

"You filthy little swine," remarked the stranger, "d'you really think you're going to get away with that? I suppose you're not Mr. Philip bloody Bliss! I suppose you didn't write this god-damned silly novel I've got here!" And he drew from his pocket a copy of *Quartette* and thumped it on a small table, which was upset.

"Of course I'm Philip Bliss," whimpered the novelist, "and of course I wrote the novel, but I don't see what on earth that has to do with you, or why you should come in here threatening me."

"Something better than threats. I fancy," sneered Mr. Brown. "What I want to know is why in the devil's name, you damned little pup, you wanted to put me and my affairs in your rotten pimpling book!"

"But I've never even heard of you, much less seen you," complained Bliss.

"My God, you little viper, I've half a mind to strangle you!" replied the huge Brown, "and would too, if I didn't think that there was a better way of getting at you. You've got the sauce to say that you've never seen me. I suppose you'll say you've never lunched at the Savoy Grill next!"

"I shouldn't," said Bliss, "for I go there almost every day."

"Thank God for one spot of truth, at any rate," said Brown; "and perhaps you may admit next that you've even seen me there, day after day, at the next table?"

"I certainly never have," replied the novelist.

"And you've never observed me there with Mrs. Green and Mrs. Hargrave, whom you've got into trouble for no fault of their own?"

Bliss looked completely lost. "I simpl,," he said, "can't imagine what you're talking about."

"Oh, you can't, can't you?" remarked Brown. "And I suppose you can't imagine why a man should object to his name, appearance, voice, occupation, opinions and private amusements being put down in one of your filthy modern novels? You can't imagine how a Philistine like me ever happened to come across it all. You can't imagine why I

should object. You can't imagine why my women friends should mind your crawling across them with your slime. You think you can do anything in this damned free-and-easy age. Well, Mr. bloody Bliss, you'll learn something to the contrary!" He shoved his face into the shrinking Bliss's, made as if to hit him, thought better of it, sourly smiled, took a flying and successful kick at an occasional table covered with glass and china ornaments, collected over long years, barged out of the room, stamped down the stairs, banged the front door, and vanished.

VI

"But," said Bliss to his solicitor, Mr. Prodger, "this writ is quite absurd. Really I never heard of this man in my life before."

The solicitor smiled warily, though sympathetically. "Don't you think, Mr. Bliss," he said, touching finger-tips, "you might be quite candid with me, as your father was one of my oldest friends?"

Bliss felt desperate. "But I *am* being quite candid with you," he said. "Honestly, my character was a pure invention. I didn't even know there was such a person as Mr. Brown."

"Do you expect a judge to believe that story?"

"I don't know what a judge will believe; but surely a judge, when an obviously honest man is before him, should be able to see that he is telling the truth?"

"Well," said Mr. Prodger, attempting with ill success to assume an air of complete belief, "of course if you assure me that this is so, I am bound to take your word. But I am quite certain that no judge ever could. You novelists sometimes talk about the long arm of coincidence, and I can only regret that you have been the victim of a longer arm than usual."

"But what can I do?" asked Bliss, pathetically.

"Pay up, I fear, Mr. Bliss."

"But how much?"

"Well," said Mr. Prodger, pursing his lips and raising his brows, "he's asking twenty thousand."

Bliss's mouth opened. "But it's awful," he gasped. "I haven't *got* twenty thousand."

Mr. Prodger did his best to be sympathetic. "These things," he said, "are often settled out of court. I daresay if you offered ten thousand and suppression of the book, they might close."

They did.

How difficult life is, and how strewn with thorns the path of authorship !

But perhaps (if we must have a moral) Mr. Bliss was justly punished.

But perhaps (if we may be permitted another) it was very hard luck on him to bear the brunt of the counter-attack when so many others go scot-free.

And perhaps it was a bad idea to let duelling go out.

But perhaps the wrong person often got killed in a duel.

And perhaps things are so very complicated that there is no obvious manner of putting them all straight.

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

Mrs. Adis

MRS. ADIS

IN North-East Sussex a great tongue of land runs into Kent by Scotney Castle. It is a land of woods—the old hammer woods of the Sussex iron industry—and among the woods gleam the hammer-ponds, holding in their mirrors the sunsets and sunrises. Owing to the thickness of the woods—great masses of oak and beech in a dense undergrowth of hazel and chestnut and frail willow—the road that passes Mrs. Adis's cottage is dark before the twilight has crept away from the fields beyond. That night there was no twilight and no moon, only a few pricks of fire in the black sky above the trees. But what the darkness hid the silence revealed. In the absolute stillness of the night, windless and clear with the first frost of October, every sound was distinct, intensified. The distant bark of a dog at Delmonden sounded close at hand, and the man who walked on the road could hear the echo of his own footsteps following him like a knell.

Every now and then he made an effort to go more quietly, but the roadside was a mass of brambles, and their crackling and rustling was nearly as loud as the thud of his feet on the marl. Besides, they made him go slowly, and he had no time for that.

When he came to Mrs. Adis's cottage he paused a moment. Only a small patch of grass lay between it and the road—he went stealthily across it and looked in at the lighted, uncurtained window. He could see Mrs. Adis stooping over the fire, taking some pot or kettle off it. He hesitated and seemed to wonder. He was a big, hulking man, with reddish hair and freckled face, evidently of the labouring class, but not successful, judging by the vague grime and poverty of his appearance. For a moment he made as if he would open the window, then he changed his mind and went to the door instead.

He did not knock, but walked straight in.

The woman at the fire turned quickly round.

"What, you, Peter Crouch!" she said. "I didn't hear you knock."

"I didn't knock, ma'am. I didn't want anybody to hear."

"How's that?"

"I'm in trouble." His hands were shaking a little.

"What you done?"

"I shot a man, Mrs. Adis."

"You?"

"Yes—I shot him."

"You killed him?"

"I dunno."

For a moment there was silence in the small, stuffy kitchen. Then the kettle boiled over and Mrs. Adis sprang for it, mechanically putting it at the side of the fire.

She was a small, frail-looking woman, with a brown, hard face, on which the skin had dried innumerable small, hair-like wrinkles. She was probably not more than forty-two, but life treats some women hard in the agricultural districts of Sussex, and Mrs. Adis's life had been harder than most.

"What do you want me to do for you, Peter Crouch?" she said a little sourly.

"Let me stay here a bit. Is there nowhere you can put me till they've gone?"

"Who's they?"

"The keepers."

"Oh, you've had a shine with the keepers, have you?"

"Yes. I was down by Cinder Wood seeing if I could pick up anything, and the keepers found me. There was four to one, so I used my gun. Then I ran for it. They're after me; reckon they aren't far off now."

Mrs. Adis did not speak for a moment.

Crouch looked at her scarchingly, beseechingly.

"You might do it for Tom's sake," he said.

"You haven't been an over good friend to Tom," snapped Mrs. Adis.

"But Tom's been an unaccountable good friend to me; reckon he would want you to stand by me to-night."

"Well, I won't say he wouldn't, seeing as Tom always thought better of you than you deserved. Maybe you can

stay till he comes home to-night, then we can hear what he says about it."

"That'll serve my turn, I reckon. He'll be up at Ironlatch for an hour yet, and the coast will be clear by then—I can get away out of the country."

"Where'll you go?"

"I dunno. There's time to think of that."

"Well, you can think of it in here," she said dryly, opening a door which led from the kitchen into the small lean-to of the cottage. "They'll never guess you're there, specially if I tell them I ain't seen you to-night."

"You're a good woman, Mrs. Adis. I know I'm not worth your standing by me, but maybe I'd have been different if I'd had a mother like Tom's."

She did not speak, but shut the door, and he was in darkness save for a small ray of light that filtered through one of the cracks. By this light he could see her moving to and fro, preparing Tom's supper. In another hour Tom would be home from Ironlatch Farm, where he worked every day. Peter Crouch trusted Tom not to revoke his mother's kindness, for they had been friends when they went together to the National School at Lamberhurst, and since then the friendship had not been broken by their very different characters and careers.

Peter Crouch huddled down upon the sacks that filled one corner of the lean-to and gave himself up to the dreary and anxious game of waiting. A delicious smell of cooking began to filter through from the kitchen, and he hoped Mrs. Adis would not deny him a share of the supper when Tom came home, for he was very hungry and he had a long way to go.

He had fallen into a kind of helpless doze, haunted by the memories of the last two hours, recast in the form of dreams, when he was roused by the sound of footsteps on the road.

For a moment his poor heart nearly choked him with its beating. They were the keepers. They had guessed for a cert where he was—with Mrs. Adis, his old pal's mother. He had been a fool to come to the cottage. Nearly losing his self-control, he shrank into the corner shivering half-sobbing. But the footsteps went by. They did not even hesitate at the door. He heard them ring away into the frosty stillness.

The next minute Mrs. Adis stuck her head into the lean-to.

"That was them," she said shortly. "A party from the Castle. I saw them go by. They had lanterns, and I saw old Crotch and the two Boormans. Maybe it 'ud be better if you slipped out now and went towards Cansiron. You'd miss them that way and get over to Kent. There's a London train comes from Tunbridge Wells at ten to-night."

"That'd be a fine thing for me, ma'am, but I haven't the price of a ticket on me."

She went to one of the kitchen drawers. "Here's seven shillun. It'll be your fare to London and a bit over."

For a moment he did not speak, then he said: "I don't know how to thank you, ma'am."

"Oh, you needn't thank me. I am doing it for Tom. I know how unaccountable set he is on you and always was."

"I hope you won't get into trouble because of this."

"There ain't much fear. No one's ever likely to know you've been in this cottage. That's why I'd sooner you went before Tom came back, for maybe he'd bring a pal with him, and that'd make trouble. I won't say I shan't have it on my conscience for having helped you to escape the law, but shooting a keeper ain't the same as shooting an ordinary sort of man, as we all know, and maybe he ain't so much the worse, so I won't think no more about it."

She opened the door for him, but on the threshold they both stood still, for again footsteps could be heard approaching, this time from the far south.

"Maybe it's Tom," said Mrs. Adis.

"There's more than one man there, and I can hear voices."

"You'd better go back," she said shortly. "Wait till they've passed, anyway."

With an unwilling shrug he went back into the little dusty lean-to, which he had come to hate, and she locked the door upon him.

The footsteps drew nearer. They came more slowly and heavily this time. For a moment he thought they would pass also, but their momentary dulling was only the crossing of the strip of grass outside the door. The next minute there was a knock. It was not Tom, then.

Trembling with anxiety and curiosity, Peter Crouch put his eye to one of the numerous cracks in the lean-to door and looked through into the kitchen. He saw Mrs. Adis

go to the cottage door, but before she could open it a man came quickly in and shut it behind him.

Crouch recognised Vidler, one of the keepers of Scotney Castle, and he felt his hands and feet grow leaden cold. They knew where he was, then. They had followed him. They had guessed that he had taken refuge with Mrs. Adis. It was all up. He was not really hidden; there was no place for him to hide. Directly they opened the inner door they would see him. Why couldn't he think of things better. Why wasn't he cleverer at looking after himself—like other men? His legs suddenly refused to support him, and he sat down on the pile of sacks.

The man in the kitchen seemed to have some difficulty in saying what he wanted to Mrs. Adis. He stood before her silently, twisting his cap.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

"I want to speak to you, ma'am."

Peter Crouch listened, straining his ears, for his thudding heart nearly drowned the voices in the next room. Oh no, he was sure she would not give him away. If only for Tom's sake. . . . She was a game sort, Mrs. Adis.

"Well?" she said, sharply, as the man remained tongue-tied.

"I have brought you bad news, ma'am."

Her expression changed.

"What? It ain't Tom, is it?"

"He's outside," said the keeper.

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Adis, and she moved towards the door.

"Don't, ma'am. Not till I've told you."

"Told me what? Oh, be quick, man, for mercy's sake," and she tried to push past him to the door.

"There's been a row," he said, "down by Cinder Wood. There was a chap there snaring rabbits, and Tom was walking with the Boormans and me and old Crotch down from the Castle. We heard a noise in the Eighteen-pounder Spinney, and there . . . It was too dark to see who it was, and directly he saw us he made off—but we'd scared him, and he let fly with his gun. . . ."

He stopped speaking and looked at her, as if beseeching her to fill in the gaps of his story. In his corner of the lean-to Peter Crouch was as a man of sawdust.

"Tom!" said Mrs. Adis.

The keeper had forgotten his guard, and before he could prevent her she had flung open the door.

The men outside had evidently been waiting for the signal, and they came in, carrying something on a hurdle, which they put down in the middle of the kitchen floor.

"Is he dead?" asked Mrs. Adis without tears.

The men nodded. They could not find a dry voice like hers.

In the lean-to Peter Crouch had ceased to sweat and tremble. Strength had come with despair, for he knew he must despair now. Besides, he no longer wanted to escape from this thing that he had done. Oh, Tom! and I was thinking it was one of them damned keepers. Oh, Tom! And it was you that got it—got it from me! Reckon I don't want to live!

And yet life was sweet, for there was a woman at Ticehurst, a woman as staunch to him as Tom, who would go with him to the world's end even now. But he must not think of her. He had no right: his life was forfeit to Mrs. Adis.

She was sitting in the old basket armchair by the fire. One of the men had helped her into it. Another man with rough kindness had poured her out something from a flask he carried in his pocket. "Here, ma'am, take a drop of this. It'll give you strength."

"We'll go round to Ironlatch Cottage and ask Mrs. Gain to come down to you."

"Reckon this is a turble thing to have come to you, but it's the will o' Providence, as some folks say; and as for the man who did it—we've a middling good guess who he is, and he shall swing."

"We didn't see his face, but we've got his gun. He threw it into an alder when he bolted, and I swear that gun belongs to Peter Crouch, who's been up to no good since the day when Mus' Scales sacked him for stealing his corn."

"Reckon, tho', he didn't know it was Tom when he did it—he and Tom always being better friends than he deserved."

Peter Crouch was standing upright now, looking through the crack of the door. He saw Mrs. Adis struggle to her feet and stand by the table, looking down on the dead man's face. A whole eternity seemed to roll by as she stood there.

He saw her put her hand into her apron pocket, where she had thrust the key of the lean-to.

"The Boormans have gone after Crouch," said Vidler, nervously breaking the silence. "They'd a notion as he'd broken through the woods Ironlatch way. There's no chance of his having been by here? You haven't seen him to-night, ma'am?"

There was a pause.

"No," said Mrs. Adis, "I haven't seen him. Not since Tuesday." She took her hand out of her apron pocket.

"Well, we'll be getting around and fetch Mrs. Gain. Reckon you'd be glad to have her."

Mrs. Adis nodded.

"Will you carry him in there first?" and she pointed to the bedroom door.

The men picked up the hurdle and carried it into the next room. Then silently each wrung the mother by the hand and went away.

She waited until they had shut the door, then she came towards the lean-to. Crouch once more fell a-shivering. He couldn't bear it. No, he'd rather swing than face Mrs. Adis. He heard the key turn in the lock, and he nearly screamed.

But she did not come in. She merely unlocked the door, then crossed the kitchen with a heavy dragging footstep and shut herself into the room where Tom was.

Peter Crouch knew what he must do—the only thing she wanted him to do, the only thing he could possibly do. He opened the door and silently went out.

MICHAEL ARLEN

The Battle of Berkeley Square

THE BATTLE OF BERKELEY SQUARE

ONE morning not long ago a gentleman was engaged in killing worms in the gardens of Berkeley Square when it was forced on his attention that he had a pain. The pain, which was offensive, was on his left side, but, thinking at first that it was no more than a temporary stitch brought about by the unwonted exercise, he dismissed it from his mind as a pain unworthy of the notice of an officer and a gentleman, and went on killing worms according to the directions on the tin.

This was a large tin, and, held at an angle in the gentleman's right hand, a white powder issued therefrom and covered the blades of grass, whilst with his left hand he manœuvred a syringe in such a way that a brownish liquid was sprayed upon the ground.

An entirely new and nasty smell was thus brought into the world ; nor did there appear to be any such good reason for it as is generally brought forward on behalf of a novel smell, such as industry, agriculture, and culinary necessities of certain foods, or the general progress of civilisation.

Mean, however, though our gentleman's physical position was, for he needs must bend low to the end that not a blade of grass might escape his eagle eye, mentally he took his stand on a lofty ideal ; and, dismissing the stares of passers-by as unworthy of the notice of an officer and a gentleman, continued to misbehave according to the directions on the tin.

The chemist who had sold him the tin and the syringe had sworn a pharmaceutical oath to the effect that, on his sprinkling the grass with the powder and spraying it with the lotion, not a worm in Mayfair but would instantly arise from the bowels of the earth and die.

Nor was the chemist's prophecy vain ; for the powdering and spraying had not been going on for long, when behold !

a multitude of worms arose and passed away peacefully. So great, indeed, was the massacre that a Turkish gentleman who was passing by stood at attention during a five minutes' silence, but that is quite by the way and has nothing to do with George Tarlyon's pain, which was growing more offensive with every moment.

Thinking, however, that it could be no more than an attack of lumbago, and therefore dismissing it from his mind as a pain unworthy of the notice of an officer and a gentleman, he went on killing worms, because he wanted to stand well with a pretty girl he had met the night before at a party who had said she was a Socialist and that there were too many worms in Mayfair.

Major Cypress now enters the story, and the fact that this is a true story makes it so much the more regrettable that therein the Major is presented in a tedious, not to say a repellent, light. Poor Hugo. About a year before these happenings, he had entered upon matrimony with Tarlyon's little sister Shirley, and he loved her true, even as she loved him. We will now talk a while of Hugo and Shirley.

Shirley was a darling, and Hugo had no money above that which he earned, which was nothing, and that is why they lived in a garage in the Mews behind Berkeley Square, had breakfast late, went out for dinner, and on to supper.

Not that the garage wasn't delightful. The garage was charming. Shirley herself had supervised the architects, builders, decorators, and plumbers, and by the time rooms had been added, kitchens hollowed out, bath-rooms punched in—by the time, in fact, the garage had been converted into a house, it had cost Hugo more money at rates of interest current in Jermyn Street than the lease of a fine modern residence in Berkeley Square. Poor Hugo.

Every morning at about this hour he would emerge from the garage into the Mews, pat his tie straight in the gleaming flanks of the automobiles that were being washed to the accompaniment of song and rushing water, pass the time of day with a chauffeur or two, and walk into Berkeley Square where, in the pursuit of his profession, he would loiter grimly by the railings of the gardens until the clocks struck twelve.

The word "profession" in connection with Major Cypress doubtless needs some explanation. Hugo's profession was

the most ancient in the world bar none, that of an inheritor : he was waiting for his father to die. This was the cause of great distress to his mother, as it must be to everyone who likes Hugo.

But, as Mistress Moll Flanders says, I am giving an account of what was, not of what ought or ought not to be.

All doctors are agreed that waiting has a lowering effect on the mind, but this morning Major Cypress looked, as has been stated, even more depressed than usual. And long he leant against the railings watching his brother-in-law's extraordinary behaviour before opening his lips ; when, a noise of a friendly nature being created, he waited patiently for an answer, which he did not get. He then tried to attract Tarlyon's attention by making a noise like money, but in vain.

"George," he shouted at last. "May I ask why you are behaving in that peculiar way?"

"You may," snapped Tarlyon, and, approaching him with a look of absent-minded savagery, cast a little of the powder over his breeches, squirted him with the syringe, and continued with his labours. Poor Hugo.

"George," said Major Cypress, disregarding the man's rudeness, "I am depressed this morning. Guess why?"

"Hugo," said Tarlyon bitterly, "I would be depressed every morning if I were you. Now please go away at once. These worms aren't rising half so well since you came. And I have a pain in my left side."

"A pain, George? I thought you looked sick, but I didn't like to say anything. What sort of a pain?"

"A hell of a pain," said Tarlyon. "It gets me when I breathe."

"I don't wonder," said Hugo. "I, too, have a pain. And it gets me when I eat, drink, breathe, and sleep. George, my pain is in my heart."

"I don't want to hear about it," snapped Tarlyon, "and I hope it gives you such a swelling in the feet that you can't follow me about like a moneylender after a dud cheque."

"George, I am not, and never was, a moneylender. I am, by the grace of God, a moneylender. But to return to your pain, I shouldn't wonder if you had pneumonia. You have been very liable to pneumonia ever since you took that bath on Armistice Day. And merely from the way your face has all fallen in, I should say pneumonia, quite apart from

the fact that your breath is coming in painful gasps." Tarlyon threw down the worm-killers and joined his friend. "I believe you're right, Hugo. It hurts me to breathe. I must have pneumonia. What treatment would you advise?"

"Pyjamas," said Hugo. "Nice new, amusing pyjamas. You will be in bed at least six weeks with the violent form of pneumonia you've got, and it will be a comfort to you to think of your new pyjamas."

"Suppose I die," Tarlyon muttered.

"I am supposing it, George. The pyjamas will then, I hope, revert to me."

Together they strode up the narrow defile of Berkeley Street towards Piccadilly, two men of grave mien and martial address; and although it was a bitter December morning, neither wore an overcoat, which is a polity of dress calculated to reveal, by the very action of a lounge suit on the eye on a bitter morning, the hardy frame of ships that pass in the night and the iron constitution of publicans, wine-bibbers, chaps, guys, ginks, bloods, bucks, and beaux. Nevertheless, such was the stress of the distemper within him that George Almeric St. George Tarlyon threw away his cigarette with a gesture of distaste and said: "Hugo, I am in pain. It gets me when I breathe."

"Try not to breathe," said Hugo. "In the meanwhile I will tell you why I am depressed. My wife——"

"Hugo, I am very hot. I do believe I am sweating!"

"You look awful, George. You have probably a very high temperature. Presently you will break out into a rash owing to the unclean state of your blood brought about by your low habits. You can't breakfast all your life off a gin-and-bitters and two green olives and hope to get away with it. I was telling you, George, that I am depressed because my wife is presenting me with an heir."

"It's just cussedness, Hugo. I shouldn't take any notice. Women are always the same, for ever letting one in for some extravagance. Just take no notice, Hugo."

"George, you don't understand! She is in terrible pain, and I can't bear it, old friend, I simply can't bear it."

"I'm sorry, Hugo, really I am. Poor little Shirley. But I am feeling very ill myself. Call me an ambulance, Hugo."

"Pyjamas first, my honey. Ah, here we are! Ho, there, Mr. Sleep! Ho, there, Mr. Sluis! Shop!"

For by this time the two gentlemen had arrived within the establishment of Messrs. Sleep and Sluis, gent's shirtmakers, which is situate where the Piccadilly Arcade swoops falcon-like into Jermyn Street to be as a temptation to mugs in search of a manicure.

Mr. Sleep was a small man with a round face who was a tie-specialist, and Mr. Sluis was a small man with a long face who was a shirt-specialist, while both were accomplished students of masculine *lingerie* in every branch and could, moreover, as was told in the adventure of the Princess Baba, build a white waistcoat about a waist in a way that was a wonder to the eye. By Royal Appointment, and rightly.

"My lord," said Mr. Sleep, stepping forward two paces and standing smartly at ease, "what can we do for you this morning? These new ties," said he, "have just this moment come in. They are delicious."

"Mr. Sleep," said Lord Tarlyon, "you know very well that I detest new ties. I can think of nothing more common than wearing a new tie. Observe my tie, Mr. Sleep. I have worn it six years. Observe its rugged grandeur. Where is Mr. Sluis this morning?"

"My lord," said Mr. Sluis, stepping forward three paces and bowing smartly from his self-made waist, "what sort of pyjamas do you fancy?"

"What varieties have you this morning, Mr. Sluis?"

"We have many, my lord. Pyjamas can be used for various purposes."

"You shock me, Mr. Sluis. I am not, however, going to Venice just yct. I merely want some pneumonia pyjamas."

"In *Crépe-de-chine*, my lord?"

"Your innuendoes are amazing, Mr. Sluis! Far from being that kind of man, I have always adhered to the iron principle of once an adult, always an adult. The very manhood of England is being sapped by these vicious luxuries, as one glance at my friend, Major Cypress, will show. Away with these *crépe-de-chine* pyjama suitings! And I take this opportunity, Mr. Sleep, of crying woe and woe to the pretty and the effeminate of our sex, for their lack of manly sins shall surely find them out and the odour of their overdrafts shall descend to hell. For my own pyjamas, a homely quality of antiseptic silk will do very well. I will have half a dozen suits in black silk."

"I say, George," said Hugo, "black is very lowering. Mr. Sluis, make them a lovely pale blue with a dash of maroon. They revert to me, you see."

"Black, Mr. Sluis. I fight Death with his own weapons. Send these pyjamas at once, and put them down to my account."

"Certainly, my lord, You will have them at once."

"Gentlemen," said Lord Tarlyon, "I have had forty years' experience of owing money and never yet met with such simple faith as yours. I am touched. Let me assure you that my executors will repay your courtesy, if only in kind. Good-day, Mr. Sleep, and you, Mr. Sluis. Don't, by the way, send these pyjamas to my house, as the bailiffs are in, which is why I went out in the dewy dawn and caught this pneumonia. Send them to Major Cypress's."

"But you can't have pneumonia in my place!" cried Hugo. "If you should die it will depress my wife, and that," said he indignantly, "will have an effect on my unborn heir's character."

"He will be lucky, Hugo, if he has a character at all, from what I know of you. Mr. Sleep, and you, Mr. Sluis, you might telephone to some doctors to come round instantly to Major Cypress's garage, as there will shortly be a nice new pneumonia of two cylinders on view there. Hugo, call me a taxi at once. I cannot have pneumonia. Send them to Major Cypress's."

"I don't care where you have it," said Hugo bitterly, "so long as you don't let the last agonies of your lingering death disturb my wife. Here's an idea, George! Why don't you go and have pneumonia at Fitzmaurice Savile's place nearby?"

But Tarlyon was not without a keen sense of what was proper to a stainless gentleman: he put generosity, when he thought of it, above all things; and protested now that he could not very well seek Fitzmaurice Savile's hospitality as Fitzmaurice Savile owed him money and would think that he, Tarlyon, was taking it out of him in pneumonia.

"Well, lend me a fiver, then," said Hugo desperately, but he hadn't a hope. However, he need have had no fear for his wife's comfort, for never was a sick man quieter than the last of the Tarlyons, the way he lay with closed eyes among the damp, dark clouds of fever, the way he would

smile now and then as at a joke someone was whispering to him from a far distance, so that the nurse said to the doctor : "I never saw a man appear to enjoy pneumonia so. You would think," said she, "that he was hungry for death. He is not fighting it at all, doctor. Are you sure he will not die ?"

That is what the nurse said to the doctor, and the doctor looked grave and punched Tarlyon in the lungs with a telephone arrangement, but Tarlyon took no notice at all, still smiling to himself at the thought that in his life he had done every silly thing in the world but die of pneumonia in a converted garage, and maybe he would presently be doing that and the cup of folly be drained to the dregs. And every now and then Hugo would come in and take a glass of the iced wine by Tarlyon's bed and look depressed, saying that Shirley was in pain and that he couldn't bear it.

Then one day, or maybe it was one night, Tarlyon seemed to awake from a deep sleep that had taken him to a far distance, and from that far distance what should he seem to be seeing but two shadows bending over his bed, and the calm shadow of the nurse nearby? Now he tried to speak, but he could not, and from the far distance he could hear one of the shadows saying :

"You called me in not a moment too soon, Dr. Chill.

Lord Tarlyon's is an acute case of appendicitis. Weak as he is, it is imperative that we operate at once."

"Right," said Dr. Chill.

Now Tarlyon recognised the shadow that had spoken first for Ian Black, the great surgeon, and a great friend of his since the distant days when he had operated on Tarlyon's unhappy dead wife. Virginia, she who had lived for pleasure and found only pain. And Tarlyon spoke out in a dim voice and said :

"Ian Black, much as I like having you about, you must not operate on me for appendicitis in this house, which is but a garage. Remember I am staying with Hugo, and I came to stay with him on the distinct understanding that I was to have only pneumonia. Not a word was said between us about appendicitis, and I am sure that Hugo would be annoyed at my abusing his hospitality, so will you kindly put that beastly knife away ?"

But at that very moment Hugo came in and took a glass of iced wine and looked depressed, saying that his wife was in

terrible pain and that he couldn't bear it and that the whole garage was strewn with doctors murmuring among themselves, but as to a spot of appendicitis, said Hugo, poor old George could go ahead and make himself quite at home and have just what he liked.

Whereupon Tarlyon at once closed his eyes again, and then they put something over his mouth and he passed away, thinking, "*That's* all right." But it could not have been quite all right, he thought on waking suddenly, for although he could not see very well he could hear quite distinctly, and the voice of Dr. Chill was saying :

"My dear Mr. Black, I am sorry to have to say this, but I certainly do not consider this among your most successful operations. My patient's pulse is entirely arrested, and I am afraid there is now no hope. Are you sure, Mr. Black, that the coroner will think you were quite wise to operate when he was in so low a condition? And I am sure," says he, "that you are not at all wise to sew up that wound with the sponge still inside."

"Oh, shut up!" says Mr. Black, for the same was a short-tempered man much addicted to over-calling at Bridge.

Tarlyon did not hear any more before he went off again, but when he awoke this time he did not feel the sickly after-effects of chloroform, he did not feel anything at all except that he was very weak and had a tummy-ache. The room seemed much lighter, too, than when he had seen it last, and many more people were in it, and then he heard a squealing noise, and thought : "Good God, where am I?"

And he tried to speak but could not, he tried hard but all he could achieve was a sort of mewling noise similar to the squealing noise, and then the blood simply rushed to his head with rage, for there was Hugo's tiresome face bending over him and there were Hugo's tiresome eyes simply running with tears.

He tried to turn his head away in disgust at the loathsome sight, but could not move, and then he went almost raving mad, for Hugo was trying to kiss him! Tarlyon tried to swear, and failed for the first time in his life, whereupon he made to raise his hand to catch Hugo a clout on the ear, but all he did was to pat Hugo's cheek, which the foul man took for a caress, encouraging him in his damp behaviour.

But in raising his hand Tarlyon did at least achieve some-

thing, for he saw that his hand had changed considerably during his illness, it must have, for it was now a frail and milk-white hand with a diamond ring on the third finger, so that he thought in despair: "Good God, I've died under the operation and been born again as an Argentine!"

Hugo never left the bedside until at last the doctor got him by the scruff of the neck, and, with silent cheers from Tarlyon, hurled him from the room. But even as he went through the door he turned his repulsive face towards Tarlyon and blew him a kiss, and then the fattest nurse Tarlyon had ever seen shoved a bundle under his nose and said in an idiotic voice which he supposed was meant to be cheering:

"There, there, my dear, it's a little boy you've got now, isn't he a duck, fat as a peach and all!"

Bits of the bundle were then pulled about and Tarlyon was shown what he considered was the most depressing little boy he had ever seen, with its face all wrinkled up and an entirely bald head of an unpleasant colour.

Tarlyon's first impression was that the little boy must have been drinking too much to get that colour, and he tried to wave the bundle away, but he was quite helpless, he could not move nor mutter, and the fat nurse shoved the wretched little boy's bald head against his mouth, so that he simply had to kiss it as he had not the strength to bite it.

Meanwhile, everyone in the room was smiling idiotically, as though someone had just done something clever, so that, speechless with rage as he already was, he became doubly speechless and thought to himself: "This is what comes of having pneumonia in a garage!"

Not for minutes, it seemed not for years, was the full terror of what had actually happened revealed to him. He must have been making a face of some sort, for the fat nurse brought a mirror and held it to him, saying: "There, there, don't fret. See how well you look!" And the face that Tarlyon saw in the mirror was the face of his little sister, Shirley, a pretty little white face with cheeky curled lips and large grey eyes and a frantic crown of curly golden hair.

Tarlyon tried to stammer: "Some awful mistake has been made," but not a word would come, and for very terror at what had happened he closed his eyes that he might, even as though he verily was Shirley, sob in peace.

It was for Shirley more than for himself that he was distracted with grief, for he realised only too well what must have happened. Shirley, the poor darling, must have been having terrible trouble in child-birth—and all for that foul Hugo's wretched heir with the bald head—while he had died of pneumonia-cum-appendicitis in the next room. His soul having left his body—while Ian Black and Dr. Chill were still arguing about it—he had, or it had, wandered about between the two rooms for a while and then, while Shirley wasn't looking, had slipped into her body and expelled her soul into the outer darkness.

That his supposition was only too accurate was presently proved beyond all doubt. Hugo had managed to sneak into the room again, and when Tarlyon opened his eyes he looked at Hugo beseechingly for news, whereupon the wretched man at once kissed him.

But Tarlyon must have looked so furious, even with Shirley's pretty face, that the fat nurse at once stopped Hugo from clinching again; and when Tarlyon again looked beseechingly towards the wall of the room in which he had had pneumonia Hugo nodded his head cheerfully and said: "Yes, he's dead, poor old George. Doctor said he would have lived if he hadn't been such a hard drinker. Poor old George. They are embalming the corpse in Vichy Water at the moment."

Tarlyon lost count of time, of days and nights, he lost count of everything but the number of his discomforts and fears. He spent hours with closed eyes enumerating the terrors in store for him as a woman, as a pretty woman, as Hugo's wife.

It would be no use his saying that he was not really Shirley but her brother George, for people would only think he was mad. Of course he would divorce Hugo as soon as he was better; it was too revolting to have Hugo's face shoved close to his own on the slightest provocation. Heavens, how well he now understood the many ways in which men can infuriate women!

And then, chief among the terrors of his new life, must be the bringing-up of that awful baby with the bald head. As it was, he was seeing a great deal too much of it, the fat nurse would always be bringing it to him and pushing it at him, but as to taking it into bed with him Tarlyon wasn't

having any, not even for the look of the thing when his mother came into the room.

For one day his mother did come, and she in deep mourning for his death, and she stood above him with sad eyes, and as she held the wretched baby she whispered: "Poor George! How he would have loved his little nephew!" Fat lot she knew, poor old mother.

But always it was Hugo and his repellently affectionate face who was the last straw. One evening he managed to get into the room in his pyjamas, in Tarlyon's pyjamas, in Tarlyon's black pyjamas, and saying to the fat nurse: "I must just kiss her once," furtively approached the bed. But Tarlyon was ready, and now he was just strong enough to lash out at Hugo as he bent down——

"Oi!" said Ian Black's voice. "Steady, there, you, Tarlyon!"

Tarlyon said something incredibly wicked, and Ian Black said: "You'll be all right soon. In fact you must be quite all right now, if you can swear like that. But don't land me one on the head again with that hot-water bottle, else I'll operate on you for something else. And I haven't left a sponge inside you, either. Hallo, here's Hugo with a smile like a rainbow!"

"I should think so!" cried Hugo. "Chaps, I've got a son! What do you know about that?"

"Everything!" gasped Tarlyon. "He's bald."

"Bald be blowed, George! All babies are bald. In my time I was the baldest baby in Bognor, and proud of it. He's a wonder, I tell you."

"He's awful!" sighed Tarlyon. "Go away, Hugo, go away! I'll explain later, but at the moment I am *so* tired of your face. And in future," said he sharply, "don't dare to try to kiss Shirley more than once a day."

The rest of this story is not very interesting, and nothing more need be said but that Tarlyon nowadays makes a point of advising a man never to kiss his wife without first making quite certain that she wants to be kissed, which is quite a new departure in the relations between men and women and one to be encouraged as leading to a better understanding and less waste of temper between the sexes.

As for the bald baby, he now has some hair of that neutral colour which parents call golden, and four teeth, and Hugo

shows off his scream with pride. Hugo and Shirley think he is marvellous. Maybe he is. Maybe all babies are. But it is certain that all women are, by reason of what they put up with in men one way and another.

That is what Tarlyon says, and if he does not speak on the matter with authority then this is not a true story and might just as well not have been written, which is absurd.

STACY AUMONIER

A Man of Letters

A MAN OF LETTERS

Alfred Codling to Annie Phelps.

MY Dear Annie,
I got into an awful funny mood lately. You'll think I'm barmy. It comes over me like late in the evenin when its gettin dusky. It started I think when I was in Egypt. Nearly all us chaps who was out there felt it a bit I think. When you was on sentry go in the dessert at night it was so quite and missterius. You felt you wanted to *know* things if you know what I mean. Since I've come back and settled in the saddlery again I still feel it most always. A kind of discontented funny feelin if you know what I mean. Well old girl what I mean is when we're spliced up and settled over in Tibbelsford I want to be good for you and I want to know all about things and that. Well I'm goin to write to Mr. Weekes whose a gentleman and who lives in a private house near the church. They say he is a littery society and if it be so I'm on for joinin it. You'll think I'm barmy won't you. It isn't that old dear. Me that has always been content to do my job and draw my screw on Saturday and that. You'll think me funny. When you've lived in the dessert you feel how old it all is. You want something and you don't know what it is praps its just to improve yourself and that. Anyway there it is and I'll shall write to him. See you Sunday. So long, dear.

ALF.

Alfred Codling to James Weekes, Esq.

Dear Sir,

Someone tell me you are a littery society in Tibbelsford. In which case may I offer my services as a memler and believe me,

Your obedient servant,

ALFRED CODLING.

Pendred Castaway (Secretary to James Weekes, Esq.) to Alfred Codling.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 27th inst., I beg to inform you that Mr. James Weekes is abroad. I will communicate the contents of your letter to him.

Yours faithfully,

PENDRED CASTAWAY.

Annie Phelps to Alfred Codling.

My Dear Alf,

You are a dear old funny old bean. What *is* up with you. I expeck you are just fed up. You haven't had another tutch of the fever have you. I will come and look after you Sunday. You are a silly to talk about improvin' considerin the money you are gettin and another rise next spring you say. I expeck you got fed up in the dessert and that didn't you. I expeck you wanted me sometimes, ch? I shouldn't think the littery society much cop myself. I can lend you some books. Cook is a great reader. She has nearly all Ethel M. Dells and most of Charles Garvice. She says she will lend you some if you promiss to cover in brown paper and not tare the edges. They had a big party here over the weekend a curnel a bishop two gentlemen and some smart women one very nice she gave me ten bob. We could go to the pictures come Wednesday if agreeable. Milly is walking out with a feller over at Spindlehurst in the grossery a bit flash I don't like him much. Mrs. Vaughan had one of her attacks on Monday. Lord she does get on my nerves when she's like that. Well be good and cheerio must now close. Love and kisses till Sun lay.

ANNIE.

James Weekes, Esq. (Malaga, Spain), to Alfred Codling.

Dear Sir,

My secretary informs me that you wish to join our literary society in Tibbelsford. It is customary to be proposed and seconded by two members.

Will you kindly send me your qualifications?

Yours faithfully,

JAMES WEEKES.

Alfred Codling to Annie Phelps.

My Dear Annie,

Please thank Cook for the two books which I am keepin rapt up and will not stain. I read the Eagles mate and think it is a pretty story. As you know dear I am no fist'at explaining myself. At the pictures the other night you were on to me again about gettin on and that. It isn't that. Its difficult to explane what I mean. I expeck I will always be able to make good money enough. If you havent been throw it you cant know what its like. Its somethin else I want if you know what I mean. To be honest I did not like the picturs the other night. I thought they were silly but I like to have you sittin by me and holding your hand. If I could tell you what I mean you would know. I have heard from Mr. Weekes about the littery and am writin off at once. Steve our foreman has got sacked for pinchin lether been going on for yerfes so must close with love till Sunday.

ALF.

Alfred Codling to James Weekes, Esq.

Dear Sir,

As regards your communication you ask what are my quallifications. I say I have no quallifications sir nevertheless I am wishful to join the littery. I will be candid with you sir. I am not what you might call a littery or eddicated man at all. I am in the saddlery. I was all throw Gallipoli and Egypt L corporal in the 215th Monted Blumshires. It used to come over me like when I was out there alone in the dessert. Prehaps sir you will understand me when I say it for I find folks do not understand me about it not even the girl I walk out with Annic Phelps, who is a nice girl a feller could wish. Prehaps sir you have to have been throw it if you know what I mean. When you are alone at night in the dessert its all so big and quite you want to get to know things and all about things if you know what I mean sir so prehaps you will pass me in the littery.

Your obedient servant,

ALFRED CODLING.

Annie Phelps to Alfred Codling.

Dear Alf,

You was funny Sunday. I don't know whats up with

you. You never used to be that glum I call it. Is it thinking about this littery soc turnin your head or what. Millie says you come into the kitchen like a boiled owl you was. Cheer up ole dear till Sunday week.

ANNIE.

James Weekes, Esq., to Alfred Codling.

Dear Sir,

Allow me to thank you for your charming letter. I feel that I understand your latent desires perfectly. I shall be returning to Tibbelsford in a week's time, when I hope to make your acquaintance. I feel sure that you will make a desirable member of our literary society.

Yours cordially,

JAMES WEEKES.

James Weekes to Samuel Childers.

My Dear Sam,

I received the enclosed letter yesterday and I hasten to send it on to you. Did you ever read anything more delightful? We must certainly get Alfred Codling into our society. He sounds the kind of person who would make a splendid foil to old Baldwin with his tortuous metaphysics—that is, if we can only get him to talk.

Yours ever,

J. W.

Samuel Childers to James Weekes.

My Dear Chap,

You are surely not serious about the ex-corporal! I showed his letter to Fanny. She simply screamed with laughter. But of course you mean it as a joke proposing him for the "littery." Hope to see you on Friday.

Ever yours,

S. C.

Alfred Codling to Annie Phelps.

My Dear Annie,

I was afraid you would begin to think I was barmy dear I always said so but you musnt take it like that. It is difficult to tell you about but you know my feelins to you is as always. Now I have to tell you dear that I have seen Mr. Weekes he is

a very nice old gentleman indeed he is very kind he says I can go to his hous anytime and read his books he has hundreds and hundreds. I have nevver seen so many books you have to have a ladder to clime up to some of them he is very kind he says he shall propose me for the littery soc and I can go when I like he ast me all about mysel and that was very kind and pleasant he told me all about what books I was to read and that so I think dear I wont be goin to the picturs Wenesday but will meet you by the Fire stasjon Sunday as usual.

Your lovin

ALF.

Ephraim Baldwin to James Weekes.

My Dear Weekes,

I'm afraid I cannot understand your attitude in proposing and getting Childers to second this hobbledehoy called Alfred Codling. I have spoken to him and I am quite willing to acknowledge that he may be a very good young man in his place. But why join a literary society? Surely we want to raise the intellectual standard of the society, not lower it? He is absolutely ignorant. He knows nothing at all. Our papers and discussions will be Greek to him. If you wanted an extra hand in your stables or a jobbing gardener well and good, but I must sincerely protest against this abuse of the fundamental purposes of our society.

Yours sincerely,

EPHRAIM BALDWIN.

Fanny Childers to Elspeth Pritchard.

Dear Old Thing,

I must tell you about a perfect scream that is happening here. You know the Tibbelsford literary society that Pa belongs to, and also Jimmy Weekes? Well, it's like this. Dear Old Jimmy is always doing something eccentric. The latest thing is he has discovered a mechanic in the leather trade with a soul! (I'm not sure I ought not to spell it the other way.) He is also an ex-soldier and was out in the East. He seems to have become imbued with what they called "Eastern romanticism." Anyway, he wanted to join the Society, and old Weekes rushed Pa into seconding him, and they got him through. And now a lot of the others are up in arms about it—especially old Baldwin—you know, we call him "Permanganate of Potash." If you saw him you'd

know why, but I can't tell you. I have been to two of the meetings specially to observe the mechanic with the soul. He is really quite a dear. A thick-set, square-chinned little man with enormous hands with a heavy silver ring on the third finger of his left, and tattoo marks on his right wrist. He sits there with his hands spread out on his knees and stares round at the members as though he thinks they are a lot of lunatics. The first evening he came the paper was on "The Influence of Erasmus on modern theology," and the second evening "The Drama of the Restoration." No wonder the poor soul looks bewildered. He never says a word. How is Tiny? I was in town on Thursday and got a duck of a hat. Do come over soon.

Crowds of love,

FAN.

James Weekes to Alfred Codling.

My Dear Codling,

I quite appreciate your difficulty. I would suggest that you read the following books in the order named. You will find them in my library.

Jevon's "Primer of Logic."

Welton's "Manual of Logic."

Brackenbury's "Primer of Psychology," and
Professor James' "Text Book of Psychology."

Do not be discouraged!

Sincerely yours,

JAMES WEEKES.

Annie Phelps to Alfred Codling.

Dear Alf,

I don't think you treat me quite fare. You says you are sweet on me and that and then you go on in this runny way. It isn't my falt that you got the wind up in Egypt I don't know what you mean by all this I wish the ole littery soc was dead and finish. Cook says you probibly want a blue pill you was so glum Sunday. Don't you see all these gents and girls are edicated coves are pullin yuore leg if you dont know what they talking about and that Your just makin a fule of yourself and then what about me you dont think of me its makin me a fule too. Milly says *she* wouldent have no truck with a book lowse so there it is.

ANNIE.

Alfred Codling to James Weekes, Esq.

Dear Sir,

I am much obliged to you for puttin me on them books. It beats me how they work up these things. I'm afeard I'm not scollard enough to keep the pace with these sayins and that. Its the same with the littery I lissen to the talk and sometimes I think Ive got it and then no. Sometimes I feels angry with the things said I know the speakers wrong but I cant say I feel they wrong but I dont know what to say to say it. Theres some things to big to say isnt that sir. Im much obliged to you sir for what you done Beleive me I enjoy the littery altho I most always dont know the talk I know who are the ritc ones and who are the rong ones. If you have been throw what I have been throw you would know the same sir Beleive me your

obedient servant

ALFRED CODLING.

Ephraim Baldwin to Edwin Jope, Secretary to the Tibbelsford Literary Society.

Dear Jope,

For my paper on the 19th prox. I propose to discuss "The influence of Hegelism on modern psychology."

Yours ever,

EPHRAIM BALDWIN.

Edwin Jope to Ephraim Baldwin.

Dear Mr. Baldwin,

I have issued the notices of your forthcoming paper. The subject, I am sure, will make a great appeal to our members, and I feel convinced that we are in for an illuminating and informative meeting. With regard to our little conversation on Wednesday last, I am entirely in agreement with you with regard to the quite inexplicable action of Weekes in introducing the "leather mechanic" into the society. It appears to me a quite superfluous effrontery to put upon our members. We do not want to lose Weekes, but I feel that he ought to be asked to give some explanation of his conduct. As you remark, it lowers the whole standard of the society. We might as well admit agricultural labourers, burglars,

grooms and barnmaids, and the derelicts of the town. I shall sound the opinion privately of other members.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

EDWIN JOPE.

Annie Phelps to Alfred Codling.

All right then you stick to your old littery. I am sendin you back your weddin ring you go in and out of that place nevver thinkin of me Aunt said how it would be you goin off and cetterer and getting ideas into your head what do you care. I doant think you care at all I expcck you meet a lot of these swell heads there men *and women* and you get talkin and thinkin you someone. All these years you away I wated for you faithfull I never had a thowt for other fellers and then you go on like this and treat me in this way Aunt says she wouldnt put up and Milly says a book lowse is worse than no good and so I say goo lby and that how it is now forever. You have broken my hart.

ANNE.

Annie Phelps to Alfred Codling.

"I cried all nite I didnt mean quite all I says you know how I mene dear Alf if you was only reesonible I doant mind you going the littery if you eggspain yourself. For Gawds sake meet me tonight by the fire stachon and eggspain everything.

Your broken hearted

ANNIE.

James Weekes to Samuel Childers.

My Dear Sam,

I hope Harrogate is having the desired effect upon you. I was about to say that you have missed few events of any value or interest during your absence, but I feel I must qualify that statement. You have missed a golden moment. The great Baldwin evening has come and gone and I deplore the fact that you were not there. My sense of gratification, however, is not due to Ephraim himself but to my unpopular protégé and white elephant—Alfred Codling. I tell you it was glorious! Ephraim spoke for an hour and a half, the usual thing, a dull réchauffée of Schopenhauer and Hegel,

droning forth platitudes and half-baked spohistries. When it was finished the chairman asked if anyone else wished to speak. To my amazement my ex-lance-corporal rose heavily to his feet. His face was brick red and his eyes glowed with anger. He pointed his big fingers at Ephraim and exclaimed: "Yes, talk, talk, talk—that's all it is. There's nothing in it at all!" and he hobbled out of the room (you know he was wounded in the right foot). The position, as you may imagine, was a little trying. I did not feel in the mood to stay and make apologies. I hurried after Codling. I caught him up at the end of the lane. I said, "Codling, why did you do that?" He could not speak for a long time, then he said, "I'm sorry, sir. It came over me like, all of a sudden." We walked on. At the corner by Harvey's mill we met a girl. Her face was wet—there was a fine rain pouring at the time. They looked at each other these two, then she suddenly threw out her arms and buried her face on his chest. I realised that this was no place for me and I hurried on. The following morning I received the enclosed letter. Please return it to me.

Yours ever,

JAMES.

Alfred Codling to James Weekes.

Dear Sir,

Please to icrase my name from the littery soc. I feel I have treated you bad about it but there it is. I apologise to you for treatin you bad like this that is all I regret You have always been kind and pleasant to me lendin me the books and that. I shall always be grateful to you for what you have done. It all came over me sudden like last night while that chap was spoutin out about what you call *physology*. I had never heard tell on the word till you put me on to it and now they all talk about it. I looked it up in the diction and it says somethin about the science of mind and that chap went on spoutin about it. I had quarrel with my girl we had nevvver quarrel before and I was very down about it. She is the best girl a feller could wish and I have always said so. Somehow last night while he was spoutin on it came over me sudden I thowt of the nights I had spent alone in the dessert when it was all quite and missterous and big. I had been throw it all sir. I had seen my pals what was alive one minnit

blown to pieces the next. I had tramped hundreds of miles and gone without food and watter. I had seen hell itsel sir. And when you are always with death like that sir you are always so much alive. You are alive and then the next minnit you may be dead and it makes you want to feel in touch like with everythin. You cant hate noone when you like that. You think of the other feller over there whose thinkin like you are prehaps and he all alone to lookin up the blinkin stars and it comes over you that its only love that holds us all together love and nothin else at all My hart was breaking thinkin of Annie what I had treated so bad and what I had been throw and he went on spoutin and spoutin. What does he know about *phy.ology*. You have to had been very near death to find the big things that what I found out and I couldnt tell these littery blokes that thats why I lost my temper and so please to irrase me from the soc. They cant teach me nothen that matters I've seen it all and I cant teach them nothen because they havent been throw it What I have larnt is sir that theres somethin big in our lives apart from getting on and comfits and good times and so sir I am much oblidge for all you done for me and except my appology for the way I treat you.

Your obedient servant,

ALFRED CODLING.

James Weekes to Edwin Jope.

Dear Jope,

In reply to your letter, I cannot see my way to apologise or even dissociate myself from the views expressed by Mr. Alfred Codling at our last meeting, consequently I must ask you to accept my resignation.

Yours very truly,

JAMES WEEKES.

Samuel Childers to Edwin Jope.

Dear Jope,

Taking into consideration all the circumstances of the case, I must ask you to accept my resignation from the Tibbelsford Literary Society.

Yours faithfully,

S. CHILDERS.

Annie Phelps to Alfred Codling.

My Dear Alf,

Of course its all right. I am all right now dear Alf I will try and be a good wife to you. I amnt clever like you with all your big thowts and that but I will and be a good wife to you. Aunt Em is goin' to give us that horses-hair and mother says therell be tweanty-five pounds comin' to me when Uncle Steve pegs out and he has the dropsie all right already. What do you say to Aperil if we can git that cottidge of Mrs. Plummers mothers. See you Sunday.

love from

XXXXXXXXXX

ANNIE.

Ephraim Baldwin to Edwin Jope.

Dear Mr. Jope,

As no apology has been forthcoming to me *from any quarter* for the outrageous insult I was subjected to on the occasion of my last paper, I must ask you to accept my resignation.

Yours faithfully,

EPHRAIM BALDWIN, O.B.E.

Alfred Codling to Annie Phelps.

My Dear Annie,

You will be please to hear they made me foreman this will mean an increas and so on I think April will be alright Mr. Weekes sent me check for fifty pounds to start farnishing but I took it back I said not I could not accep it having done nothin to earn it and treating him so bad over that littery soc but he said yes and he put it in such a way that I accep after all so we shall be alright for farnishin at the present. He was very kind and he says w. was to go to him at any time and I was to go on readin the books he says I shall find good things in them but not the littery soc he says he has left it hissself I feel I treated him very bad but I could not stand that feller spoutin and him never havin been throw it like what I have. That dog of Charly's killed one of Mrs. Reeves chickens Monday so must now close till Sunday with love from

Your soon husband (dont it sound funny?)

ALF.

Edwin Jope to Walter Brunning.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter I beg to say that the Tibbelsford
Literary Society is dissolved.

Yours faithfully,

E. JOPE.

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

Henry

HENRY

FOR four hours every morning and for twenty minutes before a large audience at night Fletcher was locked up with murder.

It glared at him from twelve pairs of amber eyes ; it clawed the air close to him, it spat naked hate at him, and watched with uninterrupted intensity to catch him for one moment off his guard.

Fletcher had only his will and his eyes to keep death at bay.

Of course, outside the cage into which Fletcher shut himself nightly with his twelve tigers were the keepers, standing at intervals around it with concealed pistols ; but they were outside it. The idea was that if anything happened to Fletcher they would be able by prompt action to get him out alive ; but they had his private instructions to do nothing of the kind, to shoot straight at his heart, and pick off the guilty tiger afterwards to cover their intention. Fletcher knew better than to try to preserve anything the tigers left of him, if once they had started in.

The lion-tamer in the next cage was better off than Fletcher, he was intoxicated by a rowdy vanity which dimmed fear. He stripped himself half naked every night, covered himself with ribbons, and thought so much of himself that he hardly noticed his lions. Besides, his lions had all been born in captivity, were slightly doped, and were only lions.

Fletcher's tigers weren't doped because dope dulled their fears of the whip and didn't dull their ferocity ; captivity softened nothing in them, and they hated man.

Fletcher had taught tigers since he was a child ; his father had started him on baby tigers, who were charming. They hurt you as much as they could with an absent-minded roguishness difficult to resist ; what was death to you was play to them ; but as they couldn't kill him, all the baby

tigers did was to harden Fletcher and teach him to move about quickly. Speed is the tiger's long suit, and Fletcher learned to beat them at it. He knew by a long-trained instinct when a tiger was going to move, and moved quicker so as to be somewhere else. He learned that tigers must be treated like an audience, though for different reasons; you must not turn your back upon them, because tigers associate backs with springs.

Fletcher's swift eyes moved with the flickering sureness of lightning—even quicker than lightning, for while lightning has the leisure to strike, Fletcher had to avoid being struck by something as quick as a flash and much more terrible.

After a few months the baby tigers could only be taught by fear, fear of whiplash, fear of a pocket pistol which stung them with blank cartridges and above all the mysterious fear of the human eye. Fletcher's father used to make him sit opposite him for hours practising eyes. When he was only ten years old Fletcher had learned never to show a tiger that he was afraid of him.

"If you ain't afraid of a tiger, you're a fool," his father told him; "but if you show a tiger you're afraid of him, you won't even be a fool long!"

The first thing Fletcher taught his tigers, one by one in their cages, was to catch his eye; then he stared them down. He had to show them that his power of mesmerism was stronger than theirs; if once they believed this, they might believe that his power to strike was also stronger. Once Fletcher had accustomed tigers to be out-faced, he could stay in their cages for hours in comparative safety.

The next stage was to get them used to noise and light. Tigers dislike noise and light, and they wanted to take it out of Fletcher when he exposed them to it.

When it came to the actual trick teaching Fletcher relied on his voice and a long, stinging whip. The lion-tamer roared at his lions; Fletcher's voice was not loud, but it was as noticeable as a warning bell. It checked his tigers like the crack of a pistol.

For four hours every morning Fletcher, who was as kind as he was intrepid, frightened his tigers into doing tricks. He rewarded them as well; after they had been frightened enough to sit on tubs he threw them bits of raw meat. He wanted them to associate tubs with pieces of raw meat, and

not sitting on tubs with whips ; attempting to attack him, which they did during all transition stages, he wanted them to associate with flashes from his pocket pistol, followed by the impact of very unpleasant sensations. Their dislike of the pistol was an important point ; they had to learn to dislike it so much that they would, for the sake of their dislike, sacrifice their fond desire to obliterate Fletcher.

Fletcher took them one by one at first, and then rehearsed them gradually together. It was during the single lessons that he discovered Henry.

Henry had been bought, rather older than the other tigers, from a drunken sailor. The drunken sailor had tearfully persisted that Henry was not as other tigers, and that selling him at all was like being asked to part with a talented and only child.

"'E 'as a 'eart !" Henry's first proprietor repeated over and over again.

Fletcher, however, suspected this fanciful statement of being a mere ruse to raise Henry's price, and watchfully disregarded its implications.

For some time afterwards Henry bore out Fletcher's suspicions. He snarled at all the keepers, showed his teeth and clawed the air close to Fletcher's head exactly like the eleven other tigers, only with more vim. He was a very fine young tiger, exceptionally powerful and large ; the polished corners of the Temple did not shine more brilliantly than the lustrous striped skin on Henry's back, and when his painted, impassive face, heavy and expressionless as a Hindoo idol's, broke up into activity the very devils believed and trembled. Fletcher believed, but he didn't tremble—he only sat longer and longer, closer and closer to Henry's cage, watching.

The first day he went inside there seemed no good reason, either to Henry or to himself, why he should live to get out. The second day something curious happened. While he was attempting to outstare Henry and Henry was stalking him to get between him and the cage door a flash of something like recognition came into Henry's eyes, a kind of "Hail fellow well met !" He stopped stalking and sat down.

Fletcher held him firmly with his eyes ; the great painted head sank down, and amber eyes blurred and closed under Fletcher's penetrating gaze. A loud noise filled the cage,

a loud, contented, pleasant noise. Henry was purring!

Fletcher's voice changed from the sharp brief order like the crack of a whip into a persuasive companionable drawl. Henry's eyes reopened; he rose, stood rigid for a moment, and then slowly the rigidity melted out of his powerful form. Once more that answering look came into the tiger's eyes. He stared straight at Fletcher without blinking and jumped on his tub. He sat on it impassively, his tail waving, his great jaws closed. He eyed Fletcher attentively and without hate. Then Fletcher knew that this tiger was not as other tigers, not as any other tiger.

He threw down his whip, Henry never moved; he approached; Henry lifted his lip to snarl, thought better of it, and permitted the approach. Fletcher took his life in his hand and touched Henry.

Henry snarled mildly, but his great claws remained closed; his eyes expressed nothing but a gentle warning; they simply said: "You know I don't like being touched; be careful, I might have to claw you!" Fletcher gave a brief nod; he knew the margin of safety was slight, but he had a margin. He could do something with Henry.

Hour after hour every day he taught Henry, but he taught him without a pistol or whip. It was unnecessary to use anything beyond his voice and his eyes. Henry read his eyes eagerly. When he failed to catch Fletcher's meaning, Fletcher's voice help him out. Henry did not always understand even Fletcher's voice, but where he differed from the other tigers was that he wished to understand; nor had he from the first the slightest inclination to kill Fletcher.

He used to sit for hours at the back of his cage waiting for Fletcher. When he heard far off—unbelievably far off—the sound of Fletcher's step, he moved forward to the front of his cage and prowled restlessly to and fro till Fletcher unlocked the door and entered. Then Henry would crouch back a little, politely, from no desire to avoid his friend, but as a mere tribute to the superior power he felt in Fletcher. Directly Fletcher spoke, he came forward proudly and exchanged their wordless eye language.

Henry like doing his tricks alone with Fletcher. He jumped on and off his tub following the mere wave of Fletcher's hand. He soon went further, jumped on a high stool and leapt through a large white paper disc held up

by Fletcher. Although the disc looked as if he couldn't possibly get through it, yet the clean white sheet always yielded to his impact; he did get through it, blinking a little, but feeling a curious pride that he had faced the odious thing—and pleased Fletcher.

He let Fletcher sit on his back, though the mere touch of an alien creature was repulsive to him. But he stood perfectly still, his hair rising a little, his teeth bared, a growl half suffocated in his throat. He told himself it was Fletcher. He must control his impulse to fling him off and tear him up.

In all the rehearsals and performances in the huge arena, full of strange noises, blocked with alien human beings, Henry led the other tigers; and though Fletcher's influence over him was weakened, he still recognised it. Fletcher seemed farther away from him at these times, less sympathetic and godlike, but Henry tried hard to follow the intense persuasive eyes and the brief emphatic voice; he would not lose touch even with this attenuated ghost of Fletcher.

It was with Henry and Henry alone that Fletcher dared his nightly stunt, dropped the whip and stick at his feet and let Henry do his tricks as he did them in his cage alone, with nothing beyond Fletcher's eyes and voice to control him. The other eleven tigers, beaten, glaring and snarling on to their tubs, sat impassively despising Henry's unnatural docility. He had the chance they had always wanted, and he didn't take it—what kind of tiger was he?

But Henry ignored the other tigers. Reluctantly standing with all four feet together on his tub, he contemplated a further triumph. Fletcher stood before him, holding a stick between his hands and above his head, intimately, compellingly, through the language of his eyes Fletcher told Henry to jump from his tub over his head. What Fletcher said was: "Come on, old thing! Jump! Come on! I'll duck in time. You won't hurt me! It's my stunt! Stretch your old paws together and jump!"

And Henry jumped. He hated the dazzling lights, loathed the hard, unexpected, senseless sounds which followed his leap, and he was secretly terrified that he would land on Fletcher. But it was very satisfactory when, after his rush through the air, he found he hadn't touched Fletcher, but had landed on another tub carefully prepared for him; and Fletcher said to him as plainly as possible before he did the

drawer trick with the other tigers: "Well! You are a one-er, and no mistake!"

The drawer trick was the worst of Fletcher's stunts. He had to put a table in the middle of the cage and whip each tiger up to it. When he had them placed each on his tub around the table he had to feed them with a piece of raw meat deftly thrown at the exact angle to reach the special tiger for which it was intended, and to avoid contact with eleven other tigers ripe to dispute his intention. Fletcher couldn't afford the slightest mistake or a fraction of delay.

Each tiger had to have in turn his piece of raw meat, and the drawer shut after it—opened—the next morsel thrown exactly into the grasp of the next tiger, and so on until the twelve were fed.

Fletcher always placed Henry at his back. Henry snatched in turn his piece of raw meat, but he made no attempt, as the other tigers always did, to take anyone else's; and Fletcher felt the safer for knowing that Henry was at his back. He counted on Henry's power to protect him more than he counted on the four keepers standing outside the cage with their pistols. More than once, when one of the other tigers turned restive, Fletcher had found Henry rigid, but very light on his toes, close to his side, between him and danger.

The circus manager spoke to Fletcher warningly about his foolish infatuation for Henry.

"Mark my words, Fletcher," he said, "the tiger doesn't live that wouldn't do you in if it could. You give Henry too many chances—one day he'll take one of them." But Fletcher only laughed. He knew Henry; he had seen the soul of the great tiger leap to his eyes and shine there in answer to his own eyes. A man does not kill his god; at least not willingly. It is said that two thousand years ago he did some such thing, through ignorance, but Fletcher forgot this incident. Besides, on the whole, he believed more in Henry than he did in his fellow men.

This was not surprising, because Fletcher had very little time for human fellowship. When he was not teaching tigers not to kill him, he rested from the exhaustion of the nerves which comes from a prolonged companionship with eager, potential murderers; and the rest of the time Fletcher boasted of Henry to the lion-tamer, and taught Henry new tricks.

Macormack, the lion-tamer, had a very good stunt lion, and he was extravagantly jealous of Henry. He could not make his lion go out backwards before him from the arena cage into the passage as Henry had learned to do before Fletcher, and when he had tried Ajax had, not seriously, but with an intention rather more than playful, flung him against the bars of the cage.

Macormack brooded deeply on this slight from his pet, and determined to take it out of Fletcher's.

"Pooh!" he said. "You call yourself damned plucky for laying your ole 'oof on 'Enry's scruff, and e' don't 'alf look wicked while you're doin' it. Why don't ye put yer 'ead in 'is mouf and be done with it? That 'ud be talking, that would!"

"I wouldn't mind doing it," said Fletcher reflectively, after a brief pause, "once I get him used to the idea. 'Is jaw aint so big as a lion's, still I could get the top of me 'ead in."

The lion-tamer swaggered off jeering, and Fletcher thought out how best to lay this new trick before Henry for his approval.

But from the first Henry didn't approve of it. He showed quite plainly that he didn't want his head touched. He didn't like his mouth held forcibly open, and wouldn't have anything put between his teeth without crunching. Fletcher wasted several loaves of bread over the effort—and only succeeded once or twice gingerly and very ungracefully in getting portions of his own head in and out in safety. Henry roared long and loudly at him, clawed the air, and flashed all the language he could from his flaming eyes into Fletcher's, to explain that this thing wasn't done between tigers! It was hitting below the belt! An infringement of an instinct too deep for him to master: and Fletcher knew that he was outraging Henry's instinct, and decided to refrain.

"It ain't fair to my tiger!" he said to himself regretfully; and he soothed Henry with raw meat and endearments, promising to refrain from his unnatural venture.

But when the hour for the performance came, Fletcher forgot his promise. He was enraged at Macormack's stunt lion for getting more than his share of the applause. He had the middle cage, and what with the way Macormack swaggered half naked in his scarlet ribbons, and the lion roared—the

pulverising, deep-toned, desert roar—and yet did all his tricks one after the other like a little gentleman, it did seem as if Henry barely got a round of his due applause.

Henry jumped through his white disc—so did the stunt lion! He took his leap over Fletcher's head—the stunt lion did something flashy with a drum, not half as dangerous, and the blind and ingorant populace ignored Henry and preferred the drum.

"I don't care!" said Fletcher to himself. "Henry's got to take my head in his mouth whether he likes it or not—that'll startle 'em!"

He got rid of all the other tigers. Henry was used to that, he liked it; now he would do his own final stunt—walk out backwards into the passage which led to the cages, and Fletcher would hurry out through the arena and back to Henry's cage, give him a night extra supper, and tell him what a fine tiger he was.

But Fletcher called him into the middle of the stage instead and made him take that terrible attitude he had taught him for the new trick. His eyes said: "You'll do this once for me, old man, won't you?"

Henry's eyes said: "Don't ask it! I'm tired! I'm hungry! I want to get out!"

But Fletcher wouldn't read Henry's eyes any more. He tried to force his head sideways into the terrible open jaws, and Henry's teeth, instinctive, reluctant, compelled, closed on Fletcher's neck.

What Henry minded after the momentary relief of his instinctive action was the awful stillness of Fletcher. It wasn't the stillness of the arena—that was nothing, a mere deep indrawn breath. Fletcher lay limp between his paws, as if the trick were over, as if all tricks were over. He wouldn't get up, he didn't look at Henry. Henry's eyes gazed down unblinkingly into the blank eyes of Fletcher. All Henry's soul was in his eyes, watching for Fletcher's soul to rise to meet them. And for an age nothing happened, until at last Henry realised that nothing ever would.

Before the nearest keeper shot Henry, Henry knew that he had killed his god. He lifted up his heavy painted head and roared out through the still arena, a loud despairing cry.

His heart was pierced before they reached his heart.

GRAHAM GREENE

The End of the Party

THE END OF THE PARTY

PETER MORTON woke with a start to face the first light. Through the window he could see a bare bough drooping across a frame of silver. Rain tapped against the glass with the sound of nervous fingers. It was February the fifth.

He looked across a table, on which a night-light had guttered into a pool of water, at the other bed. Francis Morton was still asleep, and Peter lay down again with his eyes on his brother. It amused him to imagine that it was himself whom he watched—the same hair, the same eyes, the same lips and line of cheek. But the thought soon palled, and the mind went back to the fact which lent the day importance. It was the fifth of February. He could hardly believe that a year had passed since Mrs. Henne-Falcon had given her last children's party.

Francis turned suddenly upon his back and threw an arm across his face, blocking his mouth. Peter's heart began to beat fast, not with pleasure now but with uneasiness. He sat up and called across the table, "Wake up." Francis's shoulders shook and he waved a clenched fist in the air, but his eyes remained closed. To Peter Morton the whole room seemed suddenly to darken, and he had the impression of a great bird swooping. He cried again, "Wake up," and once more there was silver light and the touch of rain on the windows. Francis rubbed his eyes. "Did you call out?" he asked.

"You are having a bad dream," Peter said with confidence. Already experience had taught him how far their minds reflected each other. But he was the elder, by a matter of minutes, and that brief extra interval of light, while his brother still struggled in pain and darkness, had given him self-reliance and an instinct of protection towards the other, who was afraid of so many things.

"I dreamed that I was dead," Francis said.

"What was it like?" Peter asked with curiosity.

"I can't remember," Francis said, and his eyes turned with relief to the silver of day, as he allowed the fragmentary memories to fade.

"You dreamed of a big bird."

"Did I?" Francis accepted his brother's knowledge without question, and for a little the two lay silent in bed facing each other, the same green eyes, the same nose tilting at the tip, the same firm lips parted, and the same premature modelling of the chin. The fifth of February, Peter thought again, his mind drifting idly from the image of cakes to the prizes which might be won. Egg-and-spoon races, spearing apples in basins of water, blind man's buff.

"I don't want to go," Francis said suddenly. "I suppose Joyce will be there. . . . Mabel Warren." Hateful to him the thought of a party shared with those two. They were older than he. Joyce was thirteen and Mabel Warren fifteen. Their long pigtailed swung superciliously to a masculine stride. Their sex humiliated him, as they watched him fumble with his egg, from under lowered, scornful lids. And last year . . . he turned his face away from Peter, his cheeks scarlet.

"What's the matter?" Peter asked.

"Oh, nothing. I don't think I'm well. I've got a cold. I oughtn't to go to the party."

Peter was puzzled. "But Francis, is it a bad cold?"

"It will be a bad cold if I go to the party. Perhaps I shall die."

"Then you mustn't go," Peter said with decision, prepared to solve all difficulties with one plain sentence, and Francis let his nerves relax in a delicious relief, ready to leave everything to Peter. But though he was grateful he did not yet turn his face towards his brother. His cheeks still bore the badge of a shameful memory, of the game of hide and seek last year in the darkened house, and of how he had screamed when Mabel Warren put her hand suddenly upon his arm. He had not heard her coming. Girls were like that. Their shoes never squeaked. No boards whined under their tread. They slunk like cats on padded claws.

When the nurse came in with hot water Francis lay tranquil, leaving everything to Peter. Peter said, "Nurse, Francis has got a cold."

The tall, starched woman laid the towels across the cans

and said, without turning : " The washing won't be back till to-morrow. You must lend him some of your handkerchiefs."

" But nurse," Peter asked, " hadn't he better stay in bed ? "

" We'll take him for a good walk this morning," the nurse said. " Wind'll blow away the germs. Get up now, both of you," and she closed the door behind her.

" I'm sorry," Peter said, and then, worried at the sight of a face creased again by misery and foreboding, " Why don't you just stay in bed ? I'll tell mother you felt too ill to get up."

But such a rebellion against destiny was not in Francis's power. Besides, if he stayed in bed they would come up and tap his chest and put a thermometer in his mouth and look at his tongue, and they would discover that he was malingering. It was true that he felt ill, a sick, empty sensation in his stomach and a rapidly beating heart, but he knew that the cause was only fear, fear of the party, fear of being made to hide by himself in the dark, unaccompanied by Peter and with no night-light to make a blessed breach.

" No, I'll get up," he said, and then with sudden desperation, " but I won't go to Mrs. Henne-Falcon's party. I swear on the Bible I won't." Now surely all would be well, he thought. God would not allow him to break so solemn an oath. He would show him a way. There was all the morning before him and all the afternoon until four o'clock. No need to worry now when the grass was still crisp with the early frost. Anything might happen. He might cut himself or break his leg or really catch a bad cold. God would manage somehow.

He had such confidence in God that when at breakfast his mother said, " I hear you have a cold, Francis," he made light of it. " We should have heard more about it," his mother said with irony, " if there was not a party this evening." And Francis smiled uneasily, amazed and daunted by her ignorance of him. His happiness would have lasted longer if, out for a walk that morning, he had not met Joyce. He was alone with his nurse, for Peter had leave to finish a rabbit hutch in the woodshed. If Peter had been there he would have cared less ; the nurse was Peter's nurse also, but now it was as though she were employed only for his sake, because he could not be trusted to go for a walk alone. Joyce was only two years older and she was by herself.

She came striding towards them, pigtails flapping. She glanced scornfully at Francis and spoke with ostentation to the nurse. "Hello, nurse. Are you bringing Francis to the party this evening? Mabel and I are coming." And she was off again down the street in the direction of Mabel Warren's home, consciously alone and self-sufficient in the long empty road. "Such a nice girl," the nurse said. But Francis was silent, feeling again the jump-jump of his heart, realising how soon the hour of the party would arrive. God had done nothing for him, and the minutes flew.

They flew too quickly to plan any evasion, or even to prepare his heart for the coming ordeal. Panic nearly overcame him when, all unready, he found himself standing on the doorstep, with coat-collar turned up against a cold wind, and the nurse's electric torch making a short, luminous trail through the darkness. Behind him were the lights of the hall and the sound of a servant laying the table for dinner, which his mother and father would eat alone. He was nearly overcome by a desire to run back into the house and call out to his mother that he would not go to the party, that he dared not go. They could not make him go. Almost he could hear himself saying those final words, breaking down for ever, as he knew instinctively, the barrier of ignorance that saved his mind from his parent's knowledge. "I'm afraid of going. I won't go. I daren't go. They'll make me hide in the dark, and I'm afraid of the dark. I'll scream and scream and scream." He could see the expression of amazement on his mother's face, and then the cold confidence of a grown-up's retort. "Don't be silly. You must go. We've accepted Mrs. Henne-Falcon's invitation." But they couldn't make him go; hesitating on the doorstep while the nurse's feet crunched across the frost-covered grass to the gate, he knew what. He would answer: "You can say I'm ill. I won't go. I won't go. I'm afraid of the dark." And his mother: "Don't be silly. You know there's nothing to be afraid of in the dark." But he knew the falsity of that reasoning; he knew how they taught also that there was nothing to fear in death, and how they pushed and fought and cowered to avoid it. But they couldn't make him go to the party. "I'll scream. I'll scream."

"Francis, come along." He heard the nurse's voice across the black, dimly phosphorescent lawn, and saw the small yellow

circle of her torch wheel from tree to shrub and back to tree again. "I'm coming," he called with despair, and left the lighted doorway of the house, for he could not bring himself to lay bare his last secrets and end reserve between his mother and himself.

And there was still in the last resort a further appeal possible to Mrs. Henne-Falcon. He comforted himself with that, as he advanced steadily across the hall, very small, towards her enormous bulk. His heart beat unevenly, but he had control now over his voice, as he said with meticulous accent, "Good evening, Mrs. Henne-Falcon. It was very good of you to ask me to your party." With his strained face lifted towards the curve of her breasts, and his polite, set speech, he was like an old, withered man. For Francis mingled little with other children. As a twin he was in many ways an only child. To address Peter was to speak to his own image in a mirror, an image a little altered by a flaw in the glass, so as to throw back less a likeness of what he was than of what he wished to be, what he would be without his unreasoning fear of darkness, footsteps of strangers, the flight of bats in dusk-filled gardens.

"Sweet child," said Mrs. Henne-Falcon absentmindedly before, with a wave of her arms, as though the children were a flock of chickens, she whirled them into her set programme of entertainments, egg-and-spoon races, three-legged races, the spearing of apples, games which held for Francis nothing worse than humiliation. And in the frequent intervals when nothing was required of him and he could stand alone in corners as far removed as possible from Mabel Warren's scornful gaze, he was able to plan how he might avoid the approaching terror of the dark. There was nothing, he knew, to fear until after tea, and not until he was sitting down in a pool of yellow radiance cast by the ten candles on Colin Henne-Falcon's birthday cake did he fully become conscious of the imminence of what he feared. Through the confusion of his brain, now assailed suddenly by a dozen contradictory plans, he heard Joyce's high voice down the table. "After tea we are going to play hide and seek in the dark."

"Oh no," Peter said, watching Francis's troubled face with pity and an imperfect understanding, "don't let's. We play that every year."

"But it's in the programme," cried Mabel Warren. "I saw it myself. I looked over Mrs. Henne-Falcon's shoulder. Five o'clock tea. A quarter to six to half-past six, hide and seek in the dark. It's all written down in the programme."

Peter did not argue, for if hide and seek had been inserted in Mrs. Henne-Falcon's programme nothing which he could say could avert it. He asked for another piece of birthday cake and sipped his tea slowly. Perhaps it might be possible to delay the game for a quarter of an hour, allow Francis at least a few extra minutes to form a plan; but even in that Peter failed, for children were already leaving the table in twos and threes. It was his third failure, and again, as though the reflection of an image in another's mind, he saw a great bird darken his brother's face with its wings. But he upbraided himself silently for his folly, and finished his cake encouraged by the memory of that adult refrain, "There's nothing to fear in the dark." The last to leave the table, the brothers came together to the hall to meet the mustering and impatient eyes of Mrs. Henne-Falcon.

"And now," she said, "we will play hide and seek in the dark."

Peter watched his brother and saw, as he had expected, the lips tighten. Francis, he knew, had feared this moment from the beginning of the party, had tried to meet it with courage and had abandoned the attempt. He must have prayed desperately for cunning to evade the game, which was now welcomed with cries of excitement by all the other children. "Oh, do let's." "We must pick sides." "Is any of the house out of bounds?" "Where shall home be?"

"I think," said Francis Morton, approaching Mrs. Henne-Falcon, his eyes focused unwaveringly on her exuberant breasts, "it will be no use my playing. My nurse will be calling for me very soon."

"Oh, but your nurse can wait, Francis," said Mrs. Henne-Falcon absentmindedly, while she clapped her hands together to summon to her side a few children who were already straying up the wide staircase to upper floors. "Your mother will never mind."

That had been the limit of Francis's cunning. He had refused to believe that so well-prepared an excuse could fail. All that he could say now, still in the precise tone which other children hated, thinking it a symbol of conceit, was, "I

think I had better not play." He stood motionless, retaining, though afraid, unmoved features. But the knowledge of his terror, or rather the reflection of the terror itself, reached his brother's mind. For the moment Peter Morton could have cried aloud with the fear of bright lights going out, leaving him alone in an island of dark surrounded by the gentle lapping of strange footsteps. Then he remembered that the fear was not his own, but his brother's. He said impulsively to Mrs. Henne-Falcon, "Please. I don't think Francis should play. The dark makes him jump so." They were the wrong words. Six children began to sing "Cowardy, cowardy custard," turning torturing faces with the vacancy of wide sunflowers towards Francis Morton.

Without looking at his brother, Francis said, "Of course I will play. I am not afraid. I only thought. . . ." But he was already forgotten by his human tormentors, and was able in loneliness to contemplate the approach of the spiritual and more unbounded torture. The children scrambled round Mrs. Henne-Falcon, their shrill voices pecking at her with questions and suggestions. "Yes, anywhere in the house. We will turn out all the lights. Yes, you can hide in cupboards. You must stay hidden as long as you can. There will be no home."

Peter, too, stood apart, ashamed of the clumsy manner in which he had tried to help his brother. Now he could feel, creeping in at the corners of his brain, all Francis's resentment of his championing. Several children ran upstairs, and the lights on the top floor went out. Then darkness came down like the wings of a bat and settled on the landing. Others began to put out the lights at the edge of the hall, till the children were all gathered in the single, central radiance of the chandelier, while the bats squatted round on hooded wings and waited for that, too, to be extinguished.

"You and Francis are on the hiding side," a tall girl said, and then the light was gone, and the carpet wavered under his feet with the sibilance of footfalls, like small, cold draughts, creeping away into corners.

"Where is Francis?" he wondered. "If I join him he will be less frightened of all these sounds." "These sounds" were the casing of silence. The squeak of a loose board, the cautious closing of a cupboard door, the whine of a finger drawn along polished wood.

Peter stood in the centre of the dark deserted floor, not listening, but waiting for the idea of his brother's whereabouts to enter his brain. But Francis crouched with fingers on his ears, eyes uselessly closed, mind numbed against impressions, and only a sense of strain could cross the gap of dark. Then a voice called "Coming," and, as though his brother's self-possession had been shattered by the sudden cry, Peter Morton jumped with his fear. But it was not his own fear. What in his brother was a burning panic, that admitted no ideas except those which ministered to the flame, was in him an altruistic emotion that left the reason unimpaired. "Where, if I were Francis, should I hide?" Such, roughly was his thought. And because he was, if not Francis himself, at least a mirror to him, the answer was immediate. "Between the oak bookcase, on the left of the study door, and the leather settee." Peter Morton was unsurprised by the swiftness of the response. Between the two there could be no jargon of telepathy. They had been together in the womb, and they could not now be parted.

Peter Morton tiptoed towards Francis's hiding place. Occasionally a board rattled, and, because he feared to be caught by one of the soft questers through the dark, he bent and untied his laces. A tag struck the floor, and the metallic sound set a host of cautious feet moving in his direction. But by that time he was in his stockings and would have laughed inwardly at the pursuit had not the noise of someone stumbling on his abandoned shoes made his heart trip in the reflection of another's surprise. No more boards revealed Peter Morton's progress.

On stockinged feet he moved silently and unerringly towards his object. Instinct told him that he was near the wall, and, extending a hand, he laid the fingers across his brother's face.

Francis did not cry out, but the leap of his own heart revealed to Peter a proportion of Francis's terror. "It's all right," he whispered, feeling down the squatting figure until he captured a clenched hand. "It's only me. I'll stay with you." And grasping the other tightly, he listened to the cascade of whispers his utterance had caused to fall. A hand touched the bookcase close to Peter's head, and he was aware of how Francis's fear continued, in spite of his presence. It was less intense, more bearable, he hoped, but it remained.

He knew that it was his brother's fear and not his own that he experienced. The dark to him was only an absence of light; the groping hand that of a familiar child. Patiently he waited to be found.

He did not speak again, for between Francis and himself touch was the most intimate communion. By way of the joined hands thought could flow more swiftly than lips could shape themselves round words. He could experience the whole progress of his brother's emotion, from the leap of panic at the unexpected contact to the steady pulse of fear, which now went on and on with the regularity of a heart beat. Peter Morton thought with intensity, "I am here. You needn't be afraid. The lights will go on again soon. That rustle, that movement, is nothing to fear. Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren." He bombarded the drooping form with thoughts of safety, but he was conscious that the fear continued. "They are beginning to whisper together. They are tired of looking for us. The lights will go on soon. We shall have won. Don't be afraid. That was only someone on the stairs. I believe it's Mrs. Henne-Falcon. Listen. They are feeling for the lights." Feet moving on a carpet, hands brushing a wall, a curtain pulled apart, a clicking handle, the opening of a cupboard door. In the case above their heads a loose book shifted under a touch. "Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren, only Mrs. Henne-Falcon," a crescendo of reassuring thought before the chandelier burst, like a fruit tree, into bloom.

The voices of the children rose shrilly into the radiance. "Where's Peter?" "Have you looked upstairs?" "Where's Francis?" but they were silenced again by Mrs. Henne-Falcon's scream. But she was not the first to notice Francis Morton's stillness, where he had collapsed against the wall at the touch of his brother's hand. Peter continued to hold the clenched fingers, in an arid and puzzled grief. It was not merely that his brother was dead. His brain, too young to realise the full paradox, yet wondered with an obscure self-pity why it was that the pulse of his brother's fear went on, when Francis was now where he had been always told there was no more terror and no more darkness.

ETHEL MANNIN

Romanoff

ROMANOFF

IT was not his real name, of course, but he decided that if it was good enough for the Russian Royal Family it was good enough for him. In Europe, he thought, it should be particularly effective, and it was very important to Romanoff to be effective in Europe, because he was exiled from Russia and had no visible means of support.

Unless, that is, one counted his two hands. They had earned him a living of sorts ever since he was fifteen. He was a marvellous pianist. Also he was a marvellous liar and had the faculty of self-preservation in the face of adverse circumstance developed to a truly remarkable degree. But when you have survived starvation all over Europe, from Belgrade to Berlin, from Paris to Prague, you are apt to develop this faculty.

The exploit I am about to relate is only one of his many similarly impudent and fantastic adventures, but it will show you the sort of man Romanoff was. The job of writing up the music festival for a Paris paper—he could write and speak four different languages besides his own, French, English, German, and Czecho-Slovakian—took him to Salzburg one summer.

While there he cultivated the friendship of some earnest young Americans living in the same cheap *Gasthaus* as himself, and from them he learned all about a famous American dancer who had died in tragic circumstances some years ago, but whose life-work—the cult of beauty through eurhythmics—was being carried on by an ex-pupil at a *Schloss* near Vienna.

Romanoff made a thorough investigation of the history and work of the dancer from the various books written about her and her art, and towards the end of the *Festspiel* concocted a letter to the Miss Myrtle Barton at her Viennese school. He had, he said, just returned from Boston, where

he had spent many happy hours at Miss Ruth Harper's school where she so magnificently carried on the tradition of the great, the beautiful Lavinia, and she had urged him if ever he came to Europe on no account to miss a visit to Hietzingburg.

Modestly he went on to outline his own international fame as a pianist, though, he added, when he reflected on Lavinia's great Art he felt very humble indeed, and that his own work counted for nothing. . . . Miss Barton wrote back immediately, warmly urging him to visit Hietzingburg as soon as ever his work would allow, and to remain there as their guest for as long as he wished. She had—she lied valiantly for the sake of her artistic prestige—of course often heard of the great Romanoff, and she would be very proud indeed to offer him the hospitality of her roof.

So when the music festival was finished, Romanoff went to Vienna, and thence to Hietzing where he took a room for a week in the most expensive hotel in the place, though until his cheque arrived from Paris he had not the price of a room for a night there. From this de luxe hotel he wrote to Miss Barton that he was staying there, as he found Vienna too noisy for the work he had to do, and that he hoped to find time to run over to Hietzingburg one afternoon before he left to return to Paris.

Miss Barton telephoned him at the hotel immediately she received the letter asking him couldn't he come over that afternoon for tea? He replied that it was impossible, but that he would try to find time to come the next day.

Romanoff by this time had spent nearly all his money and was subsisting on one meal a day. The day he was to go to Hietzingburg he had only breakfast, since he was to be given tea, and, he hoped, many more meals.

Miss Barton herself drove over to the hotel to bring him to the *Schloss*. She was, he thought, one of the most extraordinary looking creatures he had ever seen outside of Montparnasse. With a green silk tunic dress designed on supposedly Grecian lines she wore an immense sunhat and horn-rim spectacles and red leather sandals. Grey hair escaped in dank wisps from under her hat, and she looked red and hot.

Romanoff, who considered that the only function of a woman was to be beautiful, felt the chill of physical repulsion

creep over him. But he thought of all the good meals coming to him and responded with a charming graciousness to the warm effusiveness of her greeting. All the way out to the *Schloss* they talked art, music, beauty.

"Every time you hear a Beethoven sonata don't you feel yourself vibrate on a higher plane?" Miss Barton inquired, hurtling the shabby, antiquated car along the dusty roads. Romanoff said that he certainly did. He wanted his tea so badly that he would have said anything.

Hietzingburg, he found, consisted of two palaces, a summer palace and a winter palace, standing in acres of park full of deer and moss-grown statues and dried-up fountains. The school, he learned, functioned in the summer palace; the winter palace was thrown in with the rent. Palaces are at a premium in Austria, where nobody wants them. Romanoff, who had several times lived in palaces when he had been too poor to live anywhere else, thought that the unused winter palace would suit him nicely.

He was given tea on the terrace, and introduced as "the great Romanoff" to the rest of the staff, three equally unattractive women in Grecian draperies and sandals. The conversation was sustained on a very high note, and Romanoff played up accordingly, and spoke of his soul's vibrations and rhythms, and was a great success. The tea was disappointingly inadequate, and when he rose to be conducted round the palace he felt hungrier than when he had sat down.

He spent a tormenting hour in the vast ballroom watching the pupils, English and French girls, some of them young and very pretty, some of them of uncertain age and very plain, trailing their draperies about in rhythmic postures, while Miss Barton played an out-of-tune piano execrably.

"Of course," Miss Barton explained apologetically, when it was all over, "You don't see them at their best to-day; they are self-conscious in the presence of a stranger; it is this self-consciousness of their bodies we have to eradicate; at present their bodies are untrained to the rhythms which should co-ordinate body and soul and make them chalices of the spirit."

Romanoff said that he quite understood, that he quite agreed. He was then taken to Miss Barton's study, shown innumerable pictures of the great Lavinia, of her schools in different parts of Europe and America, and Miss Barton's

collection of replicas of Delphic pottery and sculpture.

It was altogether a very exhausting afternoon, and his hunger was incredible. When she had shown him everything she could think of, and conducted him over the empty rooms of the winter palace, Miss Barton shyly wondered whether her guest would care to remain to supper. Romanoff made a show of hesitation, and finally accepted. Mercifully supper was early. "You see," Miss Barton explained, "we aim here at the simplification of life, and go to bed with the birds and rise with them."

It was a good substantial supper, and Romanoff ate a great deal and drank liberally of the wine, and felt better. He declared himself reluctant to return to "the over-civilisation" of his hotel, and Miss Barton at once urged him not to dream of such a thing; was not the whole of the winter palace standing empty? It would be a small matter to take a bed, a rug and a chair over there, and they would be so honoured to have him one of their community for so long as he cared to remain. . . .

So Romanoff stayed, and in the morning, fearful lest he should escape, Miss Barton drove over herself to his hotel and collected his baggage—which first necessitated paying his bill—but what were a few hundred schillings compared with the privilege of having roped in the famous pianist Romanoff? Besides, he would refund her the money in due course.

But with the carelessness of the artist Romanoff "forgot" that she had even paid his bill, and how could anything so sordid as money be discussed with a great artist who honoured their community with his presence?

In a few days Romanoff had a grand piano moved into his room in the palace, and was very comfortable; he could and did practise there all day without interruption—for his art must be respected—and he was getting free board and lodging, in return for which he graced the communal table with his presence at meal-times, and occasionally played for the pupils.

The out-of-tune piano was torture to him, and he insisted on it being re-tuned, but excused himself from playing more often than not on the plea that he had so much of his own work to do. Playing for the pupils bored him beyond words; he found their writhings and posturings ridiculous, and the

soulful expressions they assumed to match the music made him want to laugh in their faces. One morning, early, before the dew was off the grass, walking in the park woods, he found the whole school assembled on the lawn in front of the summer palace, and Miss Barton haranguing the girls.

"Now, girls," she was saying to the rapt faces, "I want you to throw back your heads, relax your bodies, and allow the living force of beauty to flow into you through the cadences of music. D. H. Lawrence says——"

But what D. H. Lawrence said the girls never knew, for at that point Romanoff interrupted with a roar of satiric laughter. He leapt into their midst like a satyr sprung out of the woods, thrusting Miss Barton aside.

"Girls," he cried, "listen to me! It's all bunk. The whole school is bunk. Beauty with a capital B is bunk. Why don't you all pack up and clear off back to your homes and learn to cook and sew and wash babies? If you knew how ridiculous you all looked shivering there in the wet grass in dresses that are no more Grecian than I am Romanoff, the famous pianist! All this nonsense has no more relation to art than I have to Romanoff! Cut and run, girls—you've fooled yourselves and been fooled long enough!"

Then he turned and strode back into the woods . . . cursing himself for an impulsive idiot. Never before in his adventurous thirty-odd years of living had he known himself to behave so insanely. He was living rent free in a palace; he had his board and lodging—and no money and nowhere else to go; eventually, he knew, his bluff must be called, but there was no need to get himself turned out before that happened. Well, he had done it now, he reflected bitterly, and he had better pack and get out as quickly as he could.

He had not gone far through the woods in the direction of the winter palace before Miss Barton came tearing after him.

"Please," she called to him. "Pleas ! Don't run away—I've got something to tell you!"

He turned and waited till she came up to him. She was breathless and quite pale.

"I want to tell you," she panted. "You think you have offended us all—but you haven't. You're so right! So *fundamentally* right! I've just been telling my girls. We have been groping in the dark, and now we turn to you for guidance—you, the great artist——"

He stared at her in amazement. He said with truth: "I don't understand."

She continued, breathlessly: "You see, I've known for some time now that you're an—impostor. I wrote to Miss Harper about you, and she said that no famous pianist of the name of Romanoff had ever been in Boston—that she knew no one of that name. But it makes no difference. Here we recognise a great artist when we see one—and when one loves one forgives everything——"

She advanced towards him and seized his hands. "You mustn't go," she babbled. "All my life I have been looking for just you. You don't know what it has meant to me, your being here—I can't lose you now—I don't care who you are! Stay here and play for us—professionally. We can pay you. Stay—for the girls' sake—for my sake——"

He withdrew his hands in consternation. In a moment more, he knew, her arms would have been round his neck. She filled him with horror—and an hysterical desire to laugh. He had a sudden frightful vision of what his life would be like if he stayed—the prisoner of Miss Barton's adoration. What intimate, soul-searching conversations they would have in his room in the lonely palace by lamplight when everyone else was abed. . . . He shuddered.

But he said, quietly: "I will stay, and gladly. Go back to the girls now, and in half an hour, when I have collected myself, I will come and play for them—as never before."

"Thank you, thank you," she cried, and, seizing his hands again, kissed them in a frenzy of gratitude, then turned and ran back through the woods.

When she was out of sight Romanoff ran as hard as he could go in the direction of the winter palace. When he reached his room a figure in a green silk tunic, arranging a bunch of wild cyclamen in a tumbler on his table, straightened itself and turned a radiant face to him. He gave a howl like a trapped animal and turned and dashed out again into the sunlight, and he did not stop running until the great gates of Hietzingburg clanged behind him and the dusty, white road covered him the blessed dust of freedom.

MARTHE McKENNA

Glasshouses

GLASSHOUSES

A BEAUTIFUL spring morning shed its soft promise of summer over the budding countryside, and the red tiled, red bricked buildings of Westroosebeke looked in the awakened beams almost picturesque.

A morning to foster thoughts of kindness and neighbourly love, but no such love dwelt in the heart of Farmer Hector Bowen, and indeed his thoughts were anything but kindly disposed. For to-day he had at last made up his mind to visit his notary in Ypres and lay an action against his nearest neighbour, the widow Julia Van Proude.

Hector brooded darkly on the causes.

Ever since the return of the villagers after the war to rebuild shattered homes he had been bothered and troubled by that shamless smirking widow Julia Van Proude, and now he believed he had got her.

First of all it had been the matter of that fence, when he had won the action hands down. Then she had had the terrible nerve to bring an action against him over a right of way running flush with his ground, and a bribed judge (all the countryside knew he must have been bribed) had given the shameless widow the verdict.

Julia's property jugged into his like a jig-saw puzzle.

The young saplings and meagre fences which had been planted just a year after the armistice, replacing a glorious pre-war orchard on the widow's property, were now grown to alarming dimensions. Every morning through his bedroom window it was Hector's custom to survey his domain, and he could swear that the widow's very trees and fences were invading his terrain, moving steadily and stealthily up during the night like an invading shadow battalion.

He would scotch this invasion!

Secretly he had paced the distance from the village road running in front of his house down to her glasshouse and

he was perfectly sure that the glasshouse was built at least a metre too far into his property.

In the old days before the war the site of the glasshouse had held the porch of Julia's pretty home, which had snuggled well back from the broad Ypres road, the orchard and garden sweeping in front.

But on the return of Julia without her husband Peter, she, with an eye to future wellbeing, had rebuilt the house flush with the Ypres road and had developed the property into an excellent café, "The Bon Chance," where tourists viewing the battlefields, war graves and memorials had formed a custom of halting. For the luncheons and bock of the widow Van Proude were farred far and wide.

Julia always maintained that she liked good-looking, well set up wenches around her as serving maids, but being a shrewd, far-seeing widow, she also knew that motorists and tourists pulled up less frequently at the Bon Chance when she happened to have plain-looking maids serving bock to thirsty customers.

Jules, the handyman of Farmer Bowen, broke in on the brooding silence of his master.

"Good morning, Mister Hector, it's a fine spring morning."

"Morning, Jules," grunted Hector. "Harness Mude in the trap for to-day; I have to pull into Ypres this morning."

Jules looked slyly at his master and saw the ill-humour sitting like a cloud on his broad, pleasant face. Jules pulled the peak of his cap, expertly spat into the grass plot and, casting a swivel eye on to the sky as he moved his quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other, he ventured the time-honoured remark, a remark which never failed to bring an answering gleam of humour to his master's face.

"I ain't aheerd of no more dreams about the Million, Mr. Hector."

This was a reference to Julia's lost treasure, a subject on which Jules never failed to report the latest village gossip to his master, and which related to the flight of Julia and her husband Peter a few days before the German invaders captured the village of Westroosebeke in 1914.

In a panic, Peter had buried all their worldly wealth, gold and trinkets somewhere in the precincts of the Van Proude property, but no amount of wheedling, crying or nagging on the part of Julia could get the secret from the taciturn Peter.

All that could be dragged from him on the subject was :
"One's a secret, two's news."

The pair had found congenial refuge in Southern France where the wine flows red and free, and where Peter made up for lack of solids by imbibing large quantities of local liquids. Tearfully Julia said it was sunstroke, but, be that as it may, Peter passed from this world with great rapidity, trying at the last moment to say something to Julia with a stricken man's terrible concentration, but to no avail.

The secret died with Peter.

On returning to her native village and her shattered homestead, the widow had every inch of her land searched without result. She had had dreams and realistic visions. Secretly she had visited fortune tellers, but still the wealth lay where Peter had buried it. Whatever news ran dry in the village this was always a meaty topic to begin a discussion, for all this activity had naturally caused endless gossip, especially so when it was remembered what a "close one" Peter had been. So report and gossip had multiplied the buried treasure to huge dimensions.

On this sunny morning no answering gleam rewarded Jules's sally, for the widow was the subject of Hector's gloomy thoughts.

"Be quick, Jules, my man, and less blather. Put the butter and eggs into the trap ; I'll sell them myself. It's market day in Ypres."

Jogging along the road to Ypres, Hector's thoughts were anything but pleasant. A widower himself, he grew hot and cold when he remembered that in the first few weeks of his return to Westroosebeke he had sent secret Valentine post-cards to the widow. She had only partly guessed the source of the love messages. Then shortly afterwards had started the disputes. That skeleton in the cupboard, the Valentines, coupled with his coming interview with the notary, made his flesh creep. Dealing with lawyers—those crafty fellows who would drag out your inmost secrets, and who demanded perfect frankness (for their own ends, of course)—must be approached with deep thought and due reverence.

Doctors, pastors and the like were ordinary mortals. They could be grappled with, argued with, but those law fellows—Ugh !

Notary Louis Van Scharpe was a very busy man, with a

large practice in and around the district of Ypres. On the morning when the name of Hector Bowen was announced he smiled. He loved these simple, thrifty, hard-working country folk. They brought into his newly-furnished office a breath of the countryside and open fields, not to mention open purses.

Hector entered the inner sanctum with due deference. The sight of the new and massive oak furniture and the smell of rich leather from the great club chairs always made him nervous.

The notary, with an airy wave, motioned the farmer into the roomiest club chair. "Good day to you Hector. How did your last year's crop of tobacco work out?"

Hector brightened up at this question and at once entered into a full history, telling the notary all about the weight and what a fine quality the leaf had dried into.

The man of the law eyed the farmer shrewdly. Hector Bowen was true to type. The notary knew the farmer looked upon him as the possessor of all the diabolical tricks and knowledge outside the ken of ordinary mortals. But he also knew that at the end of the interview the farmer's hand would wander slowly to his inside pocket and bring forth a fat, well-worn wallet amply lined with thousand franc notes. Then with never a question of charges, just the remark, "I don't care what it costs, but see that you make that old cat jump. And take care she parts with the francs, too."

After the steam of the tobacco had been allowed to escape Hector felt better. Straining his burly form towards the desk of the notary in a decisive manner, he said:

"Now, Mr. Van Scharpe, I want you to see that Julia Van Proude is fixed this time. The trouble that woman gives me is past bearing. Every Sunday morning going to eight o'clock Mass she sails along that right of way dressed up in all kinds of fal-der-alls just like a ship in full sail."

A sharp spasm of pain passed over his features on mentioning the sore point of the right of way.

"Motor-cars," he continued, "and touring buses are for ever tooting and snorting on the Ypres road and the tourists wandering in her garden singing and shouting. Why, last year I had to put my man Jules as special watch on my tobacco beds, for I'm sure those robbers would pluck the leaf just for the fun of doing damage."

"Ha, ha," interposed the notary, "trespass and damage, eh?"

"No, no," hastily answered Hector, "they didn't dare climb the fence."

"So there's a fence there, eh?"

"Yes, running from her glasshouse to my other neighbour's land, Jan Mutters, you know him, don't you?"

The notary nodded.

"Well," continued Hector impressively, "I've paced the distance from the road in front of my house down to her glasshouse, and when you stand on the right of way you can see that the wall of the glasshouse juts into my land a least a full metre."

He looked at the notary in triumph.

"That'll give her something to think about when she has to move that, eh, Mr. Van Scharpe."

Rubbing his hands with appreciation, the notary nevertheless offered a word of warning.

"We must be careful and sure. It means getting a surveyor to verify the measurements exactly. Should we be in the right she will have to remove the offending building." And as an afterthought he slyly added, "That is, Hector, if we refuse to sell her the small piece of ground in question."

"What, sell my ground!" almost shouted Hector. "Not for all the gold in Flanders. She'll have to move that building or my name's not Hector Bowen. She must have bribed the surveyor who measured her land out when she came back to Westroosebeke," reasoned the farmer darkly.

"That clever one didn't get back to the village, one of the first, for nothing!"

The glasshouse attack of Hector's was a master-stroke, for he knew there was no more vulnerable spot in the armour of Julia than this move against her cherished hothouse. The widow doted on her beautiful, luscious grapes and peaches which dutifully grew more abundantly every year, and her early strawberries and salads were famous. All her spare time was spent tenderly nursing her precious crops, and not a leaf nor a speck of dust was allowed to settle in the glasshouse.

"I'll send up Mr. Landmeer to verify the measurements to-morrow," promised the notary, "then should our surmise be correct, Hector, I'll give her seven days to clear the building, or take the consequences for trespass."

"Foundations and all, every scrap of rubble, Mr. Van Scharpe," was Hector's final instruction.

"Foundations and all," confirmed the notary, gratified to notice Hector's hand wander slowly up to his inside pocket. And with the parting remark about making the old cat jump Hector left, well satisfied with his interview, almost convinced that lawyers were human after all.

Spring merged into glorious late summer and Notary Van Scharpe had almost forgotten the successful result of the glasshouse dispute, the dossier of which was pigeon-holed in some dusty receptacle, when one market day he ran full tilt into Hector Bowen in Ypres.

"Good day, Hector," greeted the lawyer heartily. "That was a great ending to the glasshouse, eh? We made the old cat jump that time, eh."

Hector stood, and then shuffled, a confused look on his good-natured face, and in a hesitating manner he said, "I'll call in to-morrow morning and see you, Mr. Van Scharpe. I have something important to say to you and explain."

"I hope there's nothing wrong, Hector." And as he saw the farmer was on tenterhooks to get away, he added, "All right, nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

With a hasty handshake and a muttered excuse, Hector left his legal mentor.

The next morning farmer Bowen was shown into the office of the notary. "George, let me have the dossier of Bowen versus Van Proude," he commanded his clerk speaking to an outer office. A bulky package of papers was promptly placed on his desk.

"Now, Hector, did you follow out my instructions?" demanded the notary.

"Yes, Mr. Van Scharpe, but only up to a certain point." A protesting lift of the lawyer's eyebrows hurried on Hector's explanation.

"I think it all started with our new pastor, and——"

"That's another meddlesome old pilot," interposed the notary, "just like his brother, the judge, who tried our glasshouse case."

"I wouldn't say that, Mr. Van Scharpe," defended the farmer. "The pastor knew nothing of that affair. It all

came about this way. About three weeks after the verdict, the pastor one Sunday preached a beautiful sermon about neighbourly love and all that kind of thing. And the little children looked so innocent, and the flowers and the candles were so pretty, it all made a man feel—well, you know what the feeling is. I almost decided to raise my man Jules's wages—and——” He stopped, confused, as he saw the surprised look on the matter-of-fact lawyer's face.

With almost a blush on his face, the farmer hastily continued: “That very same Sunday evening I took a stroll in my garden just to make sure that those fellows who were pulling down Julia's glasshouse were not damaging my tobacco bed, for those blundering clods are a careless lot. Well, I suddenly saw the widow over what remained of the glasshouse wall. And did she open out at me. Phew! She called me a crafty, sly rascal of a fellow; said that if her poor dear Peter had been alive he'd have known how to deal with a worm like me. I returned as good as she gave, and replied that from that ‘lazy, good-for-nothing lout of a Peter’ she'd canonised him into ‘poor, dear Peter’ so much, I expected when I got up there at the Golden Gates, it would be her dear Peter who'd be jangling the keys. With that she flew at me like a streak of lightning, fetching me a terrible smack across my head with the handle of a shovel that was lying in the debris.”

“Ha, ha,” broke in the notary, hopefully. “Assault and battery?”

Hector shook his head and continued:

“As you know, she is a powerful woman, and the blow dropped me like a stone. The next thing I remember was my head lying in someone's lap, and that same someone softly stroking my face and weeping quiet-like over me. I knew it was Julia, so I kept my eyes closed, and the words of the pastor's beautiful sermon, and the children and the candles and all, passed through my mind as I lay there in my tobacco bed, my head on Julia's lap. Somehow or other, I found my hand in Julia's, and I pressed it as she whispered to me: ‘Are you feeling better, Hector? Do you think you could manage to get to my house? I'll dress your head.’ With her help I struggled into her kitchen, and there with her own hands she dressed the wound.”

Hector's voice grew dreamy and sentimental. “It was so

spick and span there, and everything looked so homely, I stayed until nearly nine o'clock that night, and well . . . I suppose I may as well tell you now. We're to be married next week."

"Well, I'll be damned," ejaculated the astonished lawyer, "of all the . . ."

"But that's only half the story," broke in Hector, whose eyes shone with excitement. "I had intended coming into Ypres that week, but, since I was seedy from the effects of the blow, I stayed around, and I superintended the removal of the foundations for Julia. She insisted on finishing the removal of the glasshouse to what she considers a better site. More sun, you know, Mr. Van Scharpe. Well, I was instructing the workmen to throw the foundation rubble on the right-of-way, because that kind of rubble makes a good core, and the pathway needed it, for after a shower it gets ankle deep in mud, and Julia's so particular, you know, when suddenly one of the workmen struck something metallic, and Julia and me stood there shaking with excitement as we saw Peter's iron box come to light at last.

"We carried the box into the house and Julia unearthed the keys from somewhere, but she insisted on opening it alone in her room. When she returned her eyes were aglow with gratification, and when I asked her if she was satisfied she answered 'Yes,' but that was all I could get out of her. Even when I begged of her to tell me how much, she just answered, 'One's a secret, two's news!' It must have been something pretty considerable," reasoned Hector meditatively, "for she's bought two new aprons for each of the serving maids."

Hector sighed deeply, lost in pleasant thoughts.

The notary looked sadly at the dossier, "Bowen versus Van Proude."

Suddenly Hector sat up with an alert air and said briskly to the man of law: "Now listen, Mr. Van Scharpe, I won't waste your time on those bygone affairs. There's something Julia and I want you to attend to."

"Oh, ha, the marriage contract, I suppose?" said the notary despondently.

"Yes, yes, that, of course, but that can come later. What I mean now is something that Julia and I have been discussing for a long time." And pulling up his chair towards the desk

of the lawyer, he strained forward and hissed, "There's a sly, crafty rascal of a fellow, I mean Mutters—Jan Mutters—whose land juts into mine and Julia's property."

The face of the notary cleared with amazing rapidity at Hector's words, until at the finish it positively beamed.

"Well, that Mutters has run a wire netting fence along our border and he's let loose rabbits and poultry. They cackle and crow every minute of the day, and we are sure he's put them there just to annoy us. Not only that, but the rabbits have already started burrowing under the wire into our grounds."

"Ha, ha," said Mr. Van Scarpe briskly, "trespass and damage, eh?" Rubbing his hands with appreciation, he uttered his usual warning. "We must be careful and sure. We must get independent witnesses," and, turning to the outer office and raising his voice, he called, "George, bring in the dossier, 'Bowen versus Van P——' No, no, I mean bring in a new cover and mark it, 'Bowen v. Mutters.'"

LESLEY STORM

Discipline

DISCIPLINE

LEWIS COLE had never seen his night-watchman. He knew that the firm kept a man on the premises all night because it considerably lessened their insurance premium, but his knowledge or interest went no farther than that. Now, here was a comparatively intelligent secretary asking him if he would see Thomas, the night-watchman, "on urgent private and personal business."

"Does a night-watchman have urgent personal and private business?" he asked.

"He seems to have, Mr. Cole. He's very persistent. He should have gone home at six; he has waited four hours."

"How much does he get?"

"Two pounds a week."

"Too much. If he's asking for a rise keep him out. If not you can show him in."

He looked up from his desk as Thomas entered. He did not at all fit in with his conception that a night-watchman was something grizzled and wrinkled and bent; Thomas was an upstanding man whose shoulders stooped only slightly, and whose white hair and large dark eyes gave Mr. Cole a momentary impression of a platinum blonde.

"Well, Thomas?"

Thomas didn't hang his head or twist his cap. His large quiet eyes held Mr. Cole's, and he spoke with some deliberation.

"I waited for you, sir, because I had an extraordinary dream. I saw a train come rushing along a stretch of railway. I saw it suddenly rock—rock like a mad thing, and then plunge down a steep embankment." His voice was low and monotonous and without emotion.

This was distinctly crazy. That the night-watchman should be bringing his dreams to the head of the firm. "Yes?" he said.

"One carriage turned over and then over again, and then it crashed in a hollow and broke its back."

Mr. Cole tapped a paper knife impatiently on his desk. It was an absurd way to start a day, with a fellow like this standing there telling him his dreams. . . .

"Do you know the only dream I permit in this office, Thomas?"

"No, sir."

"Dreams for the increased prosperity of the firm, dreams for greater contracts, more"

"I know, sir, but this was a real dream. I know when they're real."

"Implying that the other is not, Thomas? Aren't you forgetting yourself?"

But Thomas continued as if he had scarcely noticed the interruption. "And when the wreckage was quiet again, sir, there was you with your head crushed between two great beams and all the life gone out of you."

Thomas spoke as if he were reading from the Bible, in the grave measured tones that have allied themselves to Hebrew prose. It may have been that, or it may have been the man's white hair and bright dark eyes, but for a full moment thought and sound were suspended so that the room might have been empty.

Then Mr. Cole laughed.

"I wouldn't laugh, sir," Thomas said softly. "There was truth in that dream."

"I'm afraid, Thomas, that it's not my kind of truth, though I appreciate your concern for me. . . ."

"I wasn't concerned, sir. I just considered it my bounden duty to tell you, and to advise you to go home to-night by some other means of transport."

"Well, you're frank, whatever else you are. I suppose you claim to have second sight or something?"

"My mother was a Macleod of the Isles, sir. I was her seventh child."

"Never heard of them. Gipsies?"

Thomas enjoyed the joke as a king might enjoy being mistaken for a king's butler.

"Oh no, sir," he laughed. "Not gipsies."

Mr. Cole felt uncomfortable and rang for his secretary. "My letters, Miss Morton. Good morning, Thomas. A

little bismuth will do your trouble a power of good. I'm never without it myself."

Thomas bowed. "I bid you good-morning, sir."

Mr. Cole was all for civility in the firm, but the civility of the employee should be of a different brand from that of the employer. Thomas did not seem to appreciate that fact. The interview had inexplicably ruffled Mr. Cole and he looked it, with his face a shade redder than usual, and his small eyes doing more blinks to the minute than one might have thought possible. It was his pride that he was a great disciplinarian, but his gratification in uncovering fear in others was a private thing. Respect was so important to him that he had developed an ear for the note in the voice of an employee and nothing irritated him more than the wrong one. He was extremely irritated now.

He blinked at his secretary. "Crazy fellow," he mumbled. "Impudent, too."

"Thomas impudent, Mr. Cole? I am surprised."

"Do you know anything about him?"

Miss Morton reddened slightly. "They say he can see into the future. He once told a man . . ."

"Pouf, Nonsense . . . what did he tell him?"

"He told him his wife was in distress. The man went home ten minutes earlier than usual and heard screams from his kitchen. Her clothing had just caught alight and he was in time to put out the flames; but if he had been ten minutes later . . . well."

Mr. Cole was not impressed. "A miracle man, eh?"

"There's something about him, Mr. Cole. I know its silly—superstition and all that—but everybody says there's something about him. The men try to get him to give them winners, but he won't. He tells them to take their money home to their wives."

"Has he got a wife?"

"Yes, she's an invalid. He adores her; he works here all night, and looks after her during the day. He has only a few hours' sleep."

"You seem to know a lot about him."

Miss Morton looked embarrassed. "I went to their house once when I was very worried about something that had happened in my life. I was afraid of the future, and Thomas read my hand and reassured me. It made a lot of difference to me."

Mr. Cole smiled sceptically. "Did you cross his hand with silver—or gold perhaps?"

"Thomas isn't that sort of man. You can't offer money to him. He would be terribly hurt."

"He's mighty independent. Now about this Dickenson contract, Miss Morton. Are you ready?"

"Yes, Mr. Cole."

But all through the morning's routine the voice and eyes of Thomas came between Mr. Cole and his work. He was not a superstitious man, and his imagination responded sluggishly to any stimulus, but the picture Thomas had drawn seemed to obtrude itself with disturbing persistence.

He lunched alone. He ordered roast duckling and sweet young peas for the first time that season and delicious new earthy potatoes; with that he chose half a bottle of his favourite Burgundy. Spring came to Mr. Cole with duckling, and new vegetables rather than with swelling buds, just as autumn came with oysters rather than with whitened webs of gossamer on the hedges or a harvest moon.

But with his laden fork half way to his mouth he paused, and an unaccustomed anxiety settled itself suddenly in the pit of his stomach. If there were any truth in what that fellow had said, then this might be his last lunch. His last food. He looked with nervous eyes around the crowded restaurant, at men and women enjoying their food and conversation, and through the beat of a heavier pulse came pity for himself and the peevish resentment of the set mind against an unsettling influence.

Men might feel like this, he thought, when they were in the hands of a blackmailer and when they had reason to fear arrest—the tap on the shoulder. He pushed his food away; it was impossible to eat with this horrible feeling of weakness around his middle. The thing was getting on his nerves. It was absurd, because he was not a superstitious man and this disintegration going on within him was an incredible acquiescence to superstition.

He ordered another half bottle of Burgundy, and when he had finished that he felt much better. He was not in the habit of drinking at lunch-time; it made him too sleepy for work in the afternoon; but to-day it seemed just what he wanted in order to restore himself to normal. The wine made him reckless. Although he loved his food, he was very careful

as to how much he should spend on it, and any over-stepping of the weekly personal expenditure which he budgeted for weighed heavily on his conscience. But to-day he had brandy with his coffee and then another brandy.

Instead of walking, he went back to the office by taxi; and instead of working, he fell fast asleep in the armchair by the fire. He slept and slept. When five o'clock came he was snoring heavily. Word had gone round the incredulous office staff that Mr. Cole was drunk, quite drunk. It was unprecedented. Miss Morton went about her business thin-lipped and shocked, the typists giggled as his snores reached the outer office; there were hurried explanations everywhere that Mr. Cole had been taken suddenly ill and could see no one. It was the most trying afternoon that Miss Morton had experienced in all the fifteen years she had been there.

The staff went as usual at 5 o'clock, but she stayed on. At 5-15 she knew he had missed his train, and at 5-30 she tried to rouse him, but without success. He groaned and grunted and slid deeper into his chair. At six she called up his home and left a message that he had been detained and that he would take a later train if possible—if not he would spend the night in town.

It was nearly seven when he awoke, muttering to himself and blinking his dazed eyes at the clock. He sat bolt upright and stared at Miss Morton.

"Ten to seven?" he questioned stupidly.

"Yes, Mr. Cole, you've been asleep!"

"Good God!"

Miss Morton waited until the full enormity of his behaviour should sink well in.

"I rang up 'The Cedars,'" she said coldly, "and left a message that you would be late. I put off your appointment with Mr. Bernstein and Mr. Stephens—I told them you were indisposed!"

"Bernstein!"

"Yes, Mr. Cole."

Mr. Cole groaned and passed his hand across his forehead.

"Bernstein," he said, whispering with dismay, "but that will cost us our contract."

"What could I do, Mr. Cole?"

"You could have shaken me, dashed cold water on me, roused me somehow." He was pacing the floor by now.

"Is there no one with any sense, any initiative in this office?"

Miss Morton felt she had just cause for indignation, but she said politely, "I tried to, Mr. Cole. It was just impossible!"

Then he recalled many things and became almost humble. "I've missed my train," he said.

"Yes—by nearly two hours."

He held his aching head in his hands and tried to think. "Miss Morton," he said suddenly, with a queer glitter in his eyes, "get Paddington station and find out . . ."

"The next train, Mr. Cole?"

"No. Find out if the five-seven is all right."

She looked at him aggressively. The man was still drunk, asking her to ring up a station and find out if a train was "all right."

"Go on," he shouted excitedly. "Find out if anything happened to it."

Miss Morton dialled the number and held a brief supercilious conversation with a station clerk. Then she turned to Mr. Cole.

"The five-seven from Paddington reached its destination without any mishap."

"Oh!"

He sat down at his desk with the muscles of his jaws working as if he were chewing something. It was a habit of his in extreme irritation or mental stress. Then he snapped at Miss Morton.

"To-morrow I want to see that night-watchman fellow. Get him here at ten o'clock. And you might find out when my next train is."

Miss Morton already had the time-table open before her.

"You won't catch one now until nine-fifteen, Mr. Cole."

"Nine-fifteen. Thank you, Miss Morton—and good night to you."

"Good night, Mr. Cole."

But on his way to catch the 9-15 Mr. Cole was waylaid and, mindful of the fact that Miss Morton had prepared the way for him, he decided to telephone home that he was detained in town for the night. The 9-15 steamed out of Paddington without him.

That night Mr. Cole was unconcerned with the radio and he did not see the morning paper until he unfolded it in a

bus coming along the Edgware Road. And there a streamer told him that disaster had overtaken a train two miles beyond Reading and that there were seven dead and twenty-one injured, many of them seriously.

The train had left Paddington at 9-15 the previous night.

Mr. Cole felt as if the blood were rushing to his head so that it nearly suffocated him, then draining away as suddenly till he felt sick and dizzy.

Seven dead! It would have been eight dead. He would have been lying there, and he knew exactly how he would have been lying—with his head crushed between two beams.

He came off the bus at the Marble Arch because he couldn't bear it, and walked all the way along Oxford street in an effort to work off the excitement within him. In the beginning he was in an exalted mood. He glowed with the thought that Providence had singled him out for escape, that just as the Angel of the Lord had come to Joseph in a dream, so He had come to a humble night-watchman in order that his—Lewis Cole's—life should be spared. A psalm of praise for Providence swelled within him.

Seven people were lying dead, and Lewis Cole was walking along Oxford Street in the sunshine! It was a miracle, the most astounding miracle he had ever heard of.

But by the time he reached the Circus it wasn't so much a miracle as a piece of luck. Sheer coincidence and good luck. He always had been a lucky man.

He grew tired of walking and finished the rest of the journey by taxi. A man who had Fortune on his side as he had needn't bother much about the extravagance of a taxi, but he wondered whether the taxi ticked up when the lights were against them at the same rate as when it was moving. Surely not. He watched the signals anxiously for green or red and muttered to himself when he saw green a little ahead, "He'll do it, he'll do it. Too late, the fool."

As he neared the office his recollections of the previous afternoon came crowding in on him. He felt distinctly uneasy, the more so because there was a gap in his memory which he could not fill in. Such a thing had never happened in his life before. If he had lowered his prestige, then he would have to tighten the reins everywhere until he had re-established himself. If they thought they could take

advantage of a lapse, and they would, of course, he would show them.

He walked pompously to the lift and bade the liftman a curt good morning.

He was earlier than usual and two typists were missing from the outer office.

"Send them to me as soon as they arrive, Miss Morton," he barked as he passed through.

He would show them all to-day.

He thought he detected pertness in one and dismissed her; he let the other off with a warning because her hands were trembling with nervousness.

Then Miss Morton reminded him. "You said last evening that you wanted Thomas to be here at ten, Mr. Cole. Did you mean it?"

Did he mean it? Was the woman implying that he had not known what he was saying?

He stared at her with narrowed eyes. "Of course I meant it. Do I ever give orders that I don't mean?"

For a whole quarter of an hour before ten o'clock Mr. Cole sat alone in the office thinking.

As ten o'clock struck Thomas was shown in.

Mr. Cole had made up his mind what to expect. Thomas would act as his saviour, as a privileged person henceforth in the firm. Well . . . He greeted him affably. "Good morning, Thomas."

"Good morning, sir."

"Strange thing, coincidence, Thomas."

"It may seem strange to some, sir," Thomas said quietly. There he was already.

"You read about that train?"

"I heard it over the wireless, sir."

"I wasn't on it."

"It wasn't your train, sir."

"It nearly was."

"Well, I'm glad you weren't on it, sir," Thomas said without concern. Mr. Cole had not expected this. He looked for a full moment at Thomas and blinked rapidly. Then he drew out his wallet, opened it and laid a five-pound note on the desk.

His movements were theatrical and his voice, when he spoke again, was affectedly slow and deliberate.

"People call me a just man, Thomas."

"I've never heard otherwise, sir."

"Just—but a stern disciplinarian. It's my creed. It has made me what I am to-day.

Thomas did not answer.

"Because I appreciate your concern for my safety I am presenting you with this . . ."

He held out the note with a manly gesture of frankness and friendliness, but the only response from Thomas was a stiffening of his hands and a curious animal contraction of his pupils.

"Thank you, sir," he said presently, "but I'd rather not take it."

Mr. Cole laughed. "You'd better take it, Thomas. You'll need it."

Thomas was sensitive to change. He fixed his grave dark eyes on Mr. Cole and waited for the rest.

Mr. Cole leaned across the desk. "You dreamed about that disaster the night before last?"

"Yes, sir,"

"There's no mistake about that?"

"No, sir."

"And you are the night-watchman engaged by this firm to be alert and aware of anything that might chance to occur during the night. If one dreams one must first be asleep. Asleep at one's post, Thomas!"

Thomas's lips parted slightly in the simple incredulity of a gentle mind. He did not speak.

"You will find a week's wages at the pay office, Thomas. Good morning."

P. C. WREN

The Dust that was Barren

THE DUST THAT WAS BARREN

I

THE soldiers of the old French Foreign Legion—who perished to a man in the Great War—had a story of The Major's Gravestone.

It was a true story and ran as follows :

A big company was marching from Biskra to Figuig.

One man, ignoring the admonitory motto, "*Marchez ou crevez*" ("March or die"), habitually lagged behind the column, from the first day of the long, long march.

On the third or fourth day he not only fell behind and lagged in the rear of the column, but actually lay down, as though too ill or too exhausted to go another step.

Captain Le Sage of the battalion, who, for some reason, had ridden back to the site of the camp of the previous night, returning, found the man, who apparently preferred dying to marching.

Captain Le Sage, a splendid officer who contrived to combine an iron discipline with genuine kindness, came upon the recumbent *légionnaire*.

"Hey, you," he said, as he reined up. "None of that, now. *Marchez ou crevez*. What's the matter?"

"I can't go another step, *mon Commandant*," groaned the man, raising his head from his arms.

"Ill?" asked Captain Le Sage.

"Dying, *mon Commandant*, I think," was the feeble reply.

Dismounting from his horse, and looping the reins over his left arm, Captain Le Sage bent over the man, turned him on to his back, and sat him up.

"Come," said he, "you don't look too bad. Take a pull at this."

And, producing his flask, he handed it to the soldier.

The man drank, while the Captain eyed him thoughtfully.

Where had he seen him before—he who had seen so many *légionnaires*? Never perhaps.

Yet—there was something about the eyes . . .

“Have another drink,” he said, “and then pull yourself together. You must get up and march in front of me. You don’t want to be filleted by the Arabs, do you, or have your eyes picked out by the vultures while you’re still alive . . . or to die of thirst? It’s a nasty death . . . Come on, up with you.”

And Captain Le Sage turned to mount his horse.

As he did so he pulled the reins over the horse’s head, arranged them in his left hand, and put his left foot in the stirrup. The soldier raised his rifle, pointed it at the back of the head of the unsuspecting officer and fired, at a range of a few feet.

It is an amazing fact that the bullet missed its mark, doing no more damage than tearing the *couvre-nuque* flap that hangs from the *képi* to protect the neck from the rays of the sun.

Wheeling about, Captain Le Sage drew his revolver from the holster at his belt and shot the man dead.

These are the actual officially admitted facts of the case.

The sequel is interesting and remarkable, and the account of it is equally true.

The next marching battalion, patrol, or *peloton méhariste* that passed that way and reached that spot was more than interested to discover that the place was marked by what appeared to be a mile-stone, and proved, in effect, to be a sort of gravestone or tombstone, for on it were neatly carved the words :

*On this spot
On the 1st December, 19—
Le Légionnaire Barren was
murdered
By Captain Le Sage*

The fact of the existence of this extraordinary memorial stone falsely commemorating, as a foul deed, an act at once of self-defence and righteous judgment, was duly reported. By order of the Governor or General commanding the zone the inscription was obliterated and the stone removed.

Before very long another military force, traversing that route and reaching that spot, found it marked by a similar stone.

The fact was again reported and again a working-party was despatched from Biskra to destroy the lying record.

And yet again a party patrolling the Biskra-Figuig Road discovered on the identical spot a memorial stone to *le Légionnaire Barren* foully murdered by Captain Le Sage.

For the third time the inscription was obliterated, the stone and all traces of it removed from the site on which it had stood bearing false witness against a gallant officer, and of the cause of death of a treacherous scoundrel.

In undue course the stone reappeared for a fourth time. And was removed.

For a fifth time. And was removed.

For a sixth time. And was removed.

For a seventh time. And was removed.

In the end, the authorities won, as the authorities must always do, against the individual.

But in one respect the individuals defeated the authorities, for the amazing mystery was never cleared up.

At least nobody knew officially, and even old Tant de Soif, doyen and Father of the Battalion, had not so much as a theory. He only knew, like the rest of the nineteenth Army Corps, that the thing did happen, that the facts as stated above were indisputable. And what Tant de Soif did not know about the Legion was not worth knowing.

For, as I have said before, if not exactly *arbiter elegantiarum*, he was the recognised arbiter of disputes and questions concerning all matters relating to the Battalion and the Regiment.

II

McSnortt and I were back in camp once more, a little surprised and a little pleased perhaps to find ourselves still alive; and, in the canteen, were celebrating our safe return and compensating ourselves for days of drought and depression.

Having but recently heard my old friend Tant de Soif speculating on the evergreen puzzle of the lying memorial stone—a problem as interesting to the soldiers of the desert as is that of the Marie Celeste to the sailors of the sea—it

occurred to me that possibly McSnortt, nearly as old a *légionnaire* as Tant de Soif himself, might have at least a theory of his own.

He had more than a theory—he had a solution. He had the whole story, indeed.

“Barren’s gravestone? Aye, of course I knew it, ye fule. What d’ye think?”

“Yes, of course, of course,” I assured McSnortt. “What I meant was, do you know how the stone reappeared time after time—who put it there and why . . . ? I’m asking you, McSnortt, bec’use even old Tant de Soif doesn’t know.”

“Of course, he doesna, the dommed old drunkard, the puir heathen. He knows nothing and he knows that wrong.”

“But *you* know about the gravestone?”

“Of course I do.”

“I was sure you would,” I said. “Probably the only man in the Legion that . . .”

“I’ll have another bottle,” interrupted McSnortt. “Barren ! Aye, ’twas Barren all right, but which Barren?”

“There were two of them, then, were there?”

“Aye; twins. And never did ye take two peas from one pod more like each to the other than those two Barrens. ’Twas uncanny. Aye, grraand lads they were.”

“English?”

“I dinna ken. I should say not. They were such dommed leears. I’ve heard them claim to be English, Scottish, Irish, American, French, German, Swiss, Russian, aye and Spanish when it suited them. If ye ask what I thought, I should have said Alsations or Lorraines.

“Anyway, they’d gone to the Legion in a hurry, and it must have been some fine prank that brought them there. I did hear that a fat police official met with an accident one night. They arrested one Barren, and he proved that it was his brother. Then they arrested the brother, and he proved it was the first onc. Then they arrested them both, and each proved an alibi. They were good at proving alibis, for when Tweedledum had a game on, Tweedledee would go and impersonate him ten miles away.

“Anyhow, while the authorities were settling which was the real Simon Pure they both escaped, and, having made

things a bit hot for themselves in the old home town, and indeed in the Old Country, they legged it for the Legion . . . and soon began the same games there. Always 'twas the other brother that had done it, and they played into each other's hand beautifully.

"Anyhow, they got sent to a big *poste* away down south, where Captain Le Sage was in command, and there they soon began the merry old tricks.

"The first time Tweedledum was up before the Captain :

" ' 'Twasn't me, sir,' said he ; ' 'twas Tweedledee.' "

" 'Is that so, now ?' said Le Sage, smiling his smile. 'He did it, and you get the blame, eh ?' "

" ' *Oui, oui, mon Commandant,*' smiled Tweedledum. ' *Hélas !* 'Tis like that so often.' "

" 'Well, it won't be like that any more,' answered Le Sage, with the little click of his jaw that his men knew. ' "

"And forthwith he sent for Tweedledee.

"And there they stood before him as like as two cartridges, two bayonets, two peas from the same pod. Aye, like Siamese twins that the good Lord God had forgotten to join together.

"And, to make assurance doubly sure, the devils both parted their hair in the middle, both grew a square-cut beard, each exactly the same size and shape as the other, and curled up their moustaches precisely alike.

"Captain Le Sage stared at 'em.

" 'Twins, of course.' "

" ' *Mais oui, Monsieur le Commandant,*' they replied as one man with one voice.

" 'Ah, and two minds with but a single thought . . . Twin souls. Well, in your lives you are moderately beautiful, and in the cells you shall not be divided . . . One and indivisible. Seven days' cells for the pair of you.

" ' *But, Monsieur Le Commandant,* I am innocent,' both exclaimed simultaneously.

" 'I'm sure you are,' purred Le Sage. 'So am I innocent and simple. Fourteen days.' "

"That was how Le Sage dealt with the Barren twins.

"And they didn't like it. They were lovers of justice, and as they so truly pointed out to their admiring and sympathising comrades, it wasn't just. They hadn't both done it, whatever it was, and obviously Le Sage was punishing

an innocent man every time they were both punished for the fault of one.

"Well, they couldna give up committing crimes, for it was not their nature to, and Captain Le Sage wasna going to give up his habit of getting the right man for such a trifle as that he got the wrong one at the same time. Not he!

"And things went from bad to worse—for the Barren twins. If one got drunk and resisted the guard both were drunk and resisting the guard, though one of them might have been asleep in his bed at the time, or on sentry go, or one of the guard itself.

"So long as the Barrens played their game of 'It wasn't me, sir, it was my brother,' so long did Captain Le Sage play his game of "Wrong again, my lad, it was both of you."

"And as it had been the life-long custom of the brothers Barren to play that game they were too old to give it up.

"Now Le Sage, as you may know, was a Commandant—he's in the Secret Service now—who considered discipline the better part of valour and indeed of soldiering . . . nine-tenths of it . . . and discipline he would have.

"So when at last it came to a real question of whether the Barrens should break his discipline or he should break the Barrens there was no doubt about the answer. And Le Sage broke them so completely that they deserted.

"Now they were clever laddies, yon Barrens, and brave, strong determined men, and although they 'made the promenade' from one of the very worst places ye could choose they got away with it.

"One day, weeks later, while they were lying in the shade of a rock, all but dead of thirst, a scout of a nomad tribe of Bedouins spotted them, and rode off to tell his sheikh the glad news.

"When the fighting men arrived they saw a double man, or two amazing strange devils, exactly alike, indistinguishable one from the other, sitting side by side, their inner arms, so to speak, linked, and their outer arms pointing straight up to the sky. There they sat, chanting a *sura* o' the Koran, and calling upon the Ninety and Nine Sacred Names of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate.

"Well, once more the Barren twins had brought it off.

"The tribe adopted them, and before so very long the sheikh, having suddenly and mysteriously died with a pain .

in his belly, in spite of the fact that the strange white men or gods had doctored him themselves, they became the one and indivisible double sheikh of the tribe.

"And soon made it what it had pretty well been before, a raiding robber gang.

"Well, with the brains, knowledge and experience of such a pair as the Barren brothers behind it the tribe's raiding business soon paid a fine deevidend, and became so well known a firm that the French authorities heard of it. Not only heard of it, but went looking for it, with a nice little desert column.

"The desert column bumped into it and very nearly bumped off Tweedledum—or Tweedledee. Anyhow, they got him, recognised him as Tweedledum—or Tweedledee—and sentenced him to quite a term with the Zephyrs.

"They didn't shoot him because all they could prove against him at the court-martial was that he was a deserter from the Legion.

"As the Prisoner's Friend pointed out in defending him, he hadn't been captured under arms making war on the French. On the contrary, the French were making war on the tribe that had captured him.

"He was sentenced for deserting, for stealing a rifle and bayonet, for losing and damaging Government property—worth five francs in the open market—and sent to the Penal Battalion to do his stretch and then be returned to the Legion to finish his term of service.

"That was Tweedledum—or Tweedledee—Barren.

"Meanwhile, Tweedledee—or Tweedledum—Barren remained as what you might call a robber Baron and Sheikh of the Beni Tarzhish tribe, and to carry on single-handed as best he could—for the first time in his life.

"Did he try to do anything for his brother?

"Did he not! He soon had his spies at work and spared neither time, men nor money to keep track of where his brother was. 'Twas his idea, of course, to wait till the puir laddie was out on road-gang work somewhere where he could swoop down with the whole of his fighting-men, wipe out the guard, and free his brother and the whole lot of them. Those that liked could join him and those that didn't could gang their ways with all the help he could give them.

"But he never got the chance.

"Perhaps Le Sage had said a word to the effect that Tweedledum—or Tweedledee—was a bird that neded a good cage, or perhaps the Penal Battalion officers found it out for themselves. Anyhow, the bonny boy did his time, whatever it was, and at long last was sent back to the Legion. I doubt if he came back looking exactly like his brother, though.

"A few years in Biribi, a chain gang, penal slavery on the roads, and so forth, leave their mark on a man.

"Anyhow, when Le Sage, as Fate would have it, was sent to Biskra to take over, just before the march to Figuig, he didna recognise Tweedledum—or Tweedledee.

"But the soldier recognised the officer. The first man who'd ever got the better of him and his brother; the man who'd broken them and driven them to desert; the man who was the cause of his having suffered those insufferable years of terrible punishment; the man whom he had so long believed to have been the cause of the death of his brother—for he had believed, from what he had heard in prison, that his twin had been killed in the battle in which he himself had been taken prisoner.

"Now ye know all the facts of how Captain Le Sage killed him on the march, don't ye?"

"Aye," I replied.

"Well, ye don't then. I'll tell ye something.

"After Le Sage had drawn his revolver and shot Barren, he dismounted, took the man's rifle, and stared thoughtfully at his dead face for a minute. As he turned away and looked up, about to remount his horse, he suddenly saw the head of a man peering at him over the top of a sand dune. An Arab. And he realised that this Budoo was not only peering at him, but peering along the sights of a rifle.

"Le Sage ducked, even as the *Bang!* came, and the bullet missed his head. Twice in a few minutes, and at a range of a few yards, a rifle had been fired at him, and he had escaped unhurt—as was the way and the luck of Le Sage.

"The rifle he had in his hand was of course unloaded.

"Again drawing his revolver he waited.

"And after a while jumped into the saddle, and, like the man he is, rode straight at the spot where his enemy must be crouching behind the ridge of the sand dune, with a loaded gun in his hands.

"Well, he wasna. He just wasna there, He had jumped

on to his racing camel and made off between the sand dunes or along a *wadi*.

"Only then it was that Le Sage returned to the road and galloped after the company.

"Now d'ye begin to see daylight, ma mannie? The Arab who had fired at Le Sage was one of the other Barren's band, hanging on the flanks of the marching company awaiting a chance to rescue Tweedledum—or Twcedledee.

"Of course the sheikh twin had got into touch with the *légionnaire* twin at Biskra and had told him what to do. He was to fall out and lie down to die at a certain spot so many kilometres from Biskra, and there, as soon as the company was out of sight and sound, he'd be 'found' by his brother.

"But the kindness of Le Sage had spoilt the little game."

"I see . . ." I murmured. "That's how it was, was it? . . . But what about the lettering of the memorial, obviously done by a regular professional stone-mason?"

"Huh!" laughed McSnorrt. "Can't ye guess what the trade of the twins had been in the old days way back in Alsace or Lorraine or wherever it was?"

"I see," I said again. "Monumental stone-masons."

"Aye. . . . And monumental rogues," replied McSnorrt censoriously as he turned down an empty glass.

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

Balalaika

BALALAIKA

THEY played, every evening, in the "Brasserie Alsacienne," at the angle of the Avenue Jules Ferry in Tunis, the corner from which electric trains go swinging out to Carthage across the ibis-haunted lagoon. They played there from six to eight. Somewhere about five-thirty the Arab boy who haunted the café and cleaned shoes on its terrace hurried from table to table with an ill-printed programme, backed by a few advertisements and many blank spaces where advertisements should have been. These programmes were headed: *Grand Concert Aperitif Orchestre Russe des Balalaikas*.

They played, and nobody heard them: neither the town Arabs, in white burnous and blue silk sock-suspenders, nor the French business men, with rosettes in their buttonholes that looked like the Legion of Honour until you saw the tell-tale Tunisian green, nor the fat Italian potato-growers, nor the lean American tourists. If you wanted music, you went to the municipal café of the Casino over the way. Here the customers didn't listen, the waiters swept past them with flying napkins, the proprietor kept his eye on them and on the clock, to see that he got his money's worth, or rather the worth of the scraps of food which he gave them at the end of the evening. From six till eight, and again from eight-thirty to eleven, the soft sentimental thrumming of their six balalaikas filled the café and its terrace with an undercurrent of sound that resembled the tremor of remote, harmonious cicadas.

No doubt they were genuine Russian refugees. North Africa, from Cairo to Tangiers, was full of them. And these were like the rest; thin, indolent, with high cheekbones, wide, supercilious mouths, and lank, ashen hair. Their manner cut them off from the rest of the people in the café as definitely as though they belonged to a distant and superior

planet. They smiled, and talked together in Russian as though they despised us; they strummed their balalaikas as if they were just putting in time.

All but one of them. The exception was a little man with a yellow face and smooth, black, Tartar hair, who carried round the plate and shook it in front of us till we forked out *centimes*. When he had finished his collection he handed it carelessly to the chief of the band and settled down in a corner, his balalaika on his knees. He neither laughed nor talked nor smoked. He sat there, playing softly to himself a tune that nobody else was intended to hear.

I should never have heard it myself if a storm of February sleet had not driven me one evening into the interior of the café. There was only one vacant chair. It stood next to his; and as I finished my *Amer Picon* in a hurry—I had no taste for balalaikas at close range—this faint, pathetic melody of his penetrated my brain, disturbed it, enchanted it.

It was a little minuet, a figure of slight grace and beauty, so bright, so artless and so sweet that, when I left the café to dine, it continued to haunt me. Fragments of it stuck in my head; the rest was lost; and the loss was so irritating that I couldn't content myself until I'd made it good. Some old Italian, I thought; perhaps Scarlatti, or could it be Mozart?

After dinner I went straight back to the café. It was almost empty; but still, in the depths of it, the six balalaikas kept up their gentle irritating tune. When they had finished their piece my friend the secret soloist crept round and jingled his plate under my nose. I put in a franc. His eyes fastened on it with wonder rather than greed.

"That tune," I said, in French, "what is it?"

"The tune we've been playing? Really, I haven't the faintest idea. Number twenty-three. You'll find the name on the programme."

"No, no, not that rubbish. I mean the tune you played to yourself."

"Ah, *that*!" he said. "You mean my Mozart?"

He bent over me for a second and began to play. The balalaika whispered so softly that no one else could hear. It was delicious, sprightly, with a queer formal grace. His eyes smiled with love as he played it.

"Yes, that's the bit I lost," I told him. "All the rest I remembered. Do play it through again."

But the eyes of the leader were on him, and the eyes of the propriotor on the leader. "Afterwards," he whispered. As he hurried back I saw him displaying my franc as an excuse for his delay.

And afterwards, as he had promised, he joined me. We took coffee together; I offered him a cigarette. "Let us talk English," he said. "It is the same to me."

"I should have guessed Mozart from the first," I told him, "but the tune was unfamiliar, and since I pretend to know my Mozart pretty thoroughly I was puzzled. Where does it come from?"

"From a suite for string orchestra," he said. "It's not surprising that you don't know it. It's never been published, and now it never will be."

"Then how did you get hold of it?" I asked.

"The manuscript was in my possession."

"And isn't any longer?"

"I have no possessions in the world. Only memories."

"This sounds like a story?"

"Not an unusual one in these days . . . and in Russia."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me?"

"Not in the least."

It began in the usual way. He was a noble of Kiev. All Russian refugees, according to their own stories, are noble, and most of them seem to have come from the province of Kiev; but this one, I believe, spoke the truth.

A noble and a dilettante of music. He lived, as he told me, on his own estate of heaven knows how many *versts* or whatever they call them. I'm sure he wasn't a good landlord, for he had been born a bookman and a musician. He had never married. He lived there quietly in his long music-room, amid the library of music-books and manuscripts that he had collected.

That library must have been a delight; for, I can tell you, he knew his subject and had spent a fortune on it; so much, indeed, that he had never been able to gratify his extreme passion for a private string quartette. Apart from this he was happy, in a hermit, sedentary way, playing and poring over the scores in his collection with the snow-light outside.

Above all periods in music he loved the eighteenth century; above all musicians Mozart. And the principal treasure of his library was a volume of Mozart manuscripts

which his agent had discovered in Vienna. The purchase nearly ruined him; he had had to bid against the German museums; but at last he got them and carried them back in pride to that sad country house of his. He had them bound sumptuously, he told me, in elegantly tooled leather, with his armorial bearings, poor dear, on the cover. Among these manuscripts was the Suite for Strings which contained that delicious minuet.

The war hardly touched him, he said. In the eastern part of the province there might have been no war, and, in any case, he was too old and too frail for soldiering.

Even the first outbreak of the Revolution left him undisturbed until the peasants completed what the town-workers had begun. He saw his district isolated by a blood-red ring of fire and rapine; but still he hung on; he thought he had no enemies. Then came the thing he called the Nakaz—the peasant mandate. He excused himself for troubling me with names:

“That was the decree,” he said, “which abolished the landlord’s ownership of land. It didn’t matter, in the very least, to me. All I wanted was to be left to myself and my music. As for the peasants, they knew I’d never done them any harm.

“But they went mad, you know,” he went on, his eyes widening, “quite mad. They were like a pack of wolves infected with rabies. In the middle of the night my bailiff—is that the word?—came bursting into my bedroom. A good fellow he was, but he was the one they’d got their knives into. ‘Vladimir Mihailitch,’ he said, ‘jump into your clothes at once; we’ve got to cut and run for it. They’re after both of us. Hurry up! No time to spare.’ He showed me a flare in the sky; they’d burnt his house already.

“I lost my head. You see, I’m not used to emergencies. ‘Wait one moment,’ I said, ‘while I get my manuscripts.’ ‘Manuscripts,’ he said. ‘Is the man mad? Money and jewels are all that matter; and for God’s sake be quick!’

“I tried to explain to him that the book was more valuable than anything else in the house. He began to storm at me. I’m a nervous man, you know, and easily frightened. ‘Books?’ he said. ‘Why, if you get away with your skin you’ll be lucky. Money! Money! For heaven’s sake come at once. Here they are!’

"It was true. We could hear their voices; they were beating on the door. I ran towards the library; he couldn't stop me; it was all my life. Then came a crash of glass. They were in at the big window over the piano. He dragged me away. Just in time. Four nights in woods and fields. It was November, and a big moon shining that made the open country dangerous. I nearly died before we reached Kiev. Perhaps it would have been better.

"Then six months in the city itself. My bailiff was a clever fellow; quite right about the money; but even with the money we nearly starved. The peasants had got their land; it intoxicated them; they saw no need for work. Result, nothing to eat. No, I'll say no more about that. You've heard all this before. I'm not the only one.

"We managed to hide in the house of a small tradesman, the bailiff's cousin, he was. We slept three in a bed. Three? Three millions, upon my honour! You've no idea how poor Russians live. But it was warm, you know. I kept the bailiff's cousin's family going with the money I'd taken with me. I didn't grudge it them. You see, I'd really no further interest in life. I used to lie in bed all day, smoking and dreaming of my poor music-room; the bookshelves with the bindings going mildewed, the Bechstein under the big window that went crash, the old violins on the walls. Will you believe it, I had an Amati? They were quite kind to me, those people. The bailiff's grandmother used to lie in bed with me for warmth. Quite proper. She was over eighty. You see, I was harmless and had plenty of money. They thought I was mad, and Russians are always sympathetic with madmen.

"My bailiff humoured me, too. He was an honest fellow, but still scared out of his life. All the time he kept on talking of plots and schemes to get me out of Russia: himself, too, of course. The idea was to work down south towards the Crimea and the Caucasus, and then. . . . You see the idea? He used to come and sprawl on my bed by the hour talking of the plans he'd made, all the possible outlets and the probable cost.

"I pretended to listen; he meant it all so well; but somehow it didn't excite me. My brain was numb; I'd left my heart behind in that room of mine. As long as it existed I didn't want to move. What's more, if it came to the point,

nothing could move me. All that I wanted to hear was news . . . news. And there wasn't any. I suppose he was afraid to ask questions.

" 'If you can tell me what's happened to my manuscripts,' I said, 'I'll discuss the Caucasus. Not before. I'm not going without them.'

"At last his thick brain seemed to realise that he could do nothing with me. He had to make an attempt. He got in touch with a peasant who came into the city in one of my old suits.

"That was how he spotted him. The peasant was a stupid fellow and much too drunk to inform against him. My house, he said, had been looted and burnt; before they'd burnt it they'd carried away most of the furniture that wasn't too heavy. Good firewood, you know. As for the books, he knew nothing about them. He wasn't interested in such things. He couldn't read.

" 'Now, Vladimir Mihailitch,' said the bailiff, 'you must see reason. Let's away while the money lasts.'

" 'If the furniture's been removed,' I told him, 'it's quite possible that the manuscripts are still in existence. Probably they're somewhere in the district. I shall wait here till you find them.'

"He couldn't see my point of view. I suppose it was natural. He flew into a temper with me. Quite violent, he was! 'Throwing away your life and mine for the sake of those old bits of paper!' But he couldn't move me. Of course I was mad. 'If you find those books,' I said, 'we'll go to-morrow.'

"And the weeks went by. Our money was running away like sand in an egg-boiler. He used to watch me in such an odd way that I began to suspect he was planning to rob me. I hid the rest of my money in my boots. I'm afraid I did him an injustice. The poor fellow died later, in the Crimea.

"Then one day he came back to me flaming with triumph. 'Vladimir Mihailitch,' he said. 'I've found them! I've found them!'

"I jumped out of bed. I threw my arms round his neck and kissed him. 'Tell me, for God's sake, tell me,' I said.

" 'I was walking along the street in the Jews' quarter,' he told me. 'There's a little hole there kept by an old Hebrew—worn clothes, brass candlesticks, scrap-iron, broken china.'

... God knows what rubbish! There he was, sitting on a pile of books: handsome books, Vladimir Mihailitch, in leather bindings. Just a chance, thought I; the merest chance! So I scared the old black spider away and had a look at them. Never tell me again that there's no such thing as Providence! If I hadn't known them by sight there was your coat-of-arms. I just gave them a kick, to show how much I valued them. "What do want for this old lot?" I asked.

"He picked them up in his skinny fingers: "It's a beautiful binding," he said: "a very wealthy binding." I laughed at him. Believe me, Vladimir Mihailitch. . . .

"I could stand it no longer. 'Where are they?' I broke on. 'Where are they?' It was life and death to me. He treated me like a child.

"Now be patient," he said. 'One thing at a time.'

"Then you haven't got them? My God! He shook his head. I took off my boot. 'Here's some money,' I said. 'Take it at once. Don't lose a moment. It doesn't matter what you pay.' In my excitement I'd shown him my hiding-place. I saw his eyes glitter; but that didn't trouble me. He waved the money aside.

"Please listen to me," he said, 'and don't interrupt. There was this old Jew turning all the stuff over and over. "Costly bindings?" I said—I was clever, mark you—"What do I want with bindings? Bindings won't light fires. Let's have a look at the paper inside them." He handed one over to me: the book with the crest on the outside. It was like drawing a tooth. I opened it. Your manuscript right enough! "What'll you take for the lot?" I said. He screwed up his black eyes: "Fifty roubles?"

"My bailiff looked cunning: 'You see, Vladimir Mihailitch, it wouldn't have done to jump at it!'

"God in heaven!' I shouted, 'I'd gladly have given a thousand!'

"Gently, gently," said the bailiff. 'Why, if I'd accepted his price he'd have known that I wanted them for something better than fire-lighting. What's more, he might have picked up a few extra roubles by informing against me. No, no. I gave the books another kick. "I'll give you fifteen," I said, "and that's more than they're worth." "Make it twenty," said he, "and let me see your money."

" 'And there he'd got me. I hadn't a kopeck on me ! I asked him for credit. He laughed at me. You catch a Jew giving credit to a stranger ! "Well, keep them for me," I said, "and I'll be back in half an hour." He wouldn't promise. I'm afraid he guessed that there was something behind it.

" 'And at that moment, that very moment, Vladimir Mihailitch, a great lumbering lout of a *moujik* came along the street with a barrow. He saw I was after something, and wanted to see what it was. These fellows are full of money, you know. He stood staring at me. I was holding a book in my hand. It seemed to puzzle him to think why I was buying them. Then a bright idea entered his thick skull. He slouched into the shop, leaving his barrow outside, never speaking a word. He went straight up to the pile of books and picked up the one with the crest outside. Then he tore a page out of the middle and held it in his teeth while he routed in his pocket. The old Jew watched him. Nice thin paper, it was. Out came a handful of tobacco. He began to roll a cigarette, and lighted it from the charcoal under the old Jew's chair. One puff, and he'd made up his mind. "How much ?" he said.

" " "Thirty roubles the lot," said the Jew.

" " "Wait half an hour and I'll give you forty," I said.

" " "No waiting here," said the Jew.

" "The peasant didn't seem to hear us. He picked up the volumes one by one and threw them on to his barrow. Cigarette paper's scarce in these days. Then he pulled out a wallet stuffed with notes and planked down his thirty roubles. The Jew was on them like a hawk. The *moujik* went off with his barrow.'

" "But of course you followed him," I said. 'You know where he went ? Let's lose no time. I'll go with you.'

" "Followed him ?' said my bailiff, with a laugh. 'Followed him ? How could I follow him ? Why, God knows where he was going. He'd got his bargain, and wasn't likely to part with it either. That's against the nature of the *moujik*. No, Vladimir Mihailitch, they've gone now. And if it's anyone's fault, it's your. You're so damned stingy with your money, and that's the truth ! If I'd had fifteen roubles in my pocket . . .'

" "God in Heaven," I said, 'you can have everything I possess if only you find him ! You know what he looks like

and the way he went. He can't go fast wheeling a barrow loaded with books. Quickly, quickly!

"The bailiff laughed at me. I think he must have been drinking. 'I can't find him; *you* can't find him; *nobody* can find him,' he said. 'You don't seem to realise that all this happened five hours ago. By this time he's having a smoke in his own hovel or helping his wife to light a fire. But you needn't think I've wasted my time. I've better uses for your money than that. Listen. I know a man who can get us through to Odessa. If you've got all that money there's no reason why we shouldn't start to-night, now that you've got these blessed manuscripts off your mind. Come along, now, Vladimir Mihailitch, pull yourself together!'

"I didn't hear him. It was as if the roof of the sky had crashed down on me. I lay in bed and howled like a child."

He stopped. There were tears in his black, pathetic eyes. The waiter hung over us, expecting another order.

"Cognac?" I suggested.

"As much as you like. God knows I need it. I've never told the story before. It's brought back the misery of those days in Kiev in such a way. . . . You must excuse me if I can't control myself." He paused for a moment, sitting still with his head bowed in his hands. Then, suddenly, he recovered himself.

"You are an educated man, sir," he said. "Possibly you have read Turgenev? He wrote a novel. *Fumée*. Smoke. That was his best title. Everything in Russia ends in smoke—like my poor manuscripts."

The waiter placed our cognac on the table; I handed my friend his glass.

"Everything in Russia," he repeated. "In smoke, like my poor manuscripts, or in liquor, like myself. *Ab . . . Je m'en fiche, je m'en fiche!* Your health, sir!"

OLIVER ONIONS

Phantas

PILANTAS

I

AS Abel Keeling lay on the galleon's deck, held from rolling down it only by his own weight and the sun-blackened hand that lay outstretched upon the planks, his gaze wandered, but ever returned to the bell that hung, jammed with the dangerous heel-over of the vessel, in the small ornamental belfry immediately abaft the mainmast. The bell was of cast bronze, with half-obliterated bosses upon it that had been the heads of cherubs; but wind and salt spray had given it a thick incrustation of bright, beautiful, lichenous green. It was this colour that Abel Keeling's eyes liked.

For wherever else on the galleon his eyes rested they found only whiteness—the whiteness of extreme eld. There were slightly varying degrees in her whiteness: here she was of a white that glistened like salt-granules, there of a greyish chalky white, and again her whiteness had the yellowish cast of decay; but everywhere it was the mild, disquieting whiteness of materials out of which the life had departed. Her cordage was bleached as old straw is bleached, and half her ropes kept their shape little more firmly than the ash of a string keeps its shape after the fire has passed; her pallid timbers were white and clean as bones found in sand; and even the wild frankincense with which (for lack of tar, at her last touching of land) she had been pitched had dried to a pale hard gum that sparkled like quartz in her open seams. The sun was yet so pale a buckler of silver through the still white mists that not a cord or timber cast a shadow; and only Abel Keeling's face and hands were black, carked and cinder-black from exposure to his pitiless rays.

The galleon was the *Mary of the Tower*, and she had a frightful list to starboard. So canted was she that her mainyard

dipped one of its steel sickles into the glassy water, and, had her foremast remained, or more than the broken stump of her bonaventure mizzen, she must have turned over completely. Many days ago they had stripped the mainyard of its course, and had passed the sail under the *Mary's* bottom, in the hope that it would stop the leak. This it had partly done as long as the galleon had continued to glide one way ; then, without coming about, she had begun to glide the other, the ropes had parted, and she had dragged the sail after her, leaving a broad tarnish on the silver sea.

For it was broadside that the galleon glided, almost imperceptibly, ever sucking down. She glided as if a loadstone drew her, and, at first, Abel Keeling had thought it was a loadstone, pulling at her iron, drawing her through the pearly mists that lay like face-cloths to the water and hid at a short distance the tarnish left by the sail. But later he had known that it was no loadstone (rawing at her iron. The motion was due—must be due—to the absolute deadness of the calm in that silent, sinister, three-miles-broad waterway. With the eye of his mind he saw that loadstone now as he lay against a gun-track, all but toppling down the deck. Soon that would happen again which had happened for five days past. He would hear again the chattering of monkeys and the screaming of parrots, the mat of green and yellow weeds would creep in towards the *Mary* over the quicksilver sea, once more the sheer wall of rock would rise, and the men would run. . . .

But no ; the men would not run this time to drop the fenders. There were no men left to do so, unless Bligh was still alive. Perhaps Bligh was still alive. He had walked half-way down the quarter-deck steps a little before the sudden nightfall of the day before. had then fallen and lain for a minute (dead, Abel Keeling had supposed, watching him from his place by the gun-track), and had then got up again and tottered forward to the forecandle, his tall figure swaying, and his long arms waving, Abel Keeling had not seen him since. Most likely he had died in the forecandle during the night. If he had not been dead he would have come aft again for water. . . .

At the remembrance of the water Abel Keeling lifted his head. The strands of lean muscle about his emaciated mouth worked, and he made a little pressure of his sun-blackened

hand on the deck, as if to verify its steepness and his own balance. The mainmast was some seven or eight yards away. . . . He put one stiff leg under him and began, seated as he was, to make shuffling movements down the slope.

To the mainmast, near the belfry, was affixed his contrivance for catching water. It consisted of a collar of rope set lower at one side than at the other (but that had been before the mast had steeved so many degrees away from the zenith), and tallowed beneath. The mists lingered later in that gully of a strait than they did on the open ocean, and the collar of rope served as a collector for the dews that condensed on the masts. The drops fell into a small earthen pipkin placed on the deck beneath it.

Abel Keeling reached the pipkin and looked into it. It was nearly a third full of fresh water. Good. If Bligh, the mate, was dead, so much the more water for Abel Keeling, master of the *Mary of the Tower*. He dipped two fingers into the pipkin and put them into his mouth. This he did several times. He did not dare to raise the pipkin to his black and broken lips for dread of a remembered agony, he could not have told how many days ago, when a devil had whispered to him, and he had gulped down the contents of the pipkin in the morning, and for the rest of the day had gone waterless. . . . Again he moistened his fingers and sucked them; then he lay sprawling against the mast, idly watching the drops of water as they fell.

It was odd how the drops formed. Slowly they collected at the edge of the tallowed collar, trembled in their fullness for an instant, and fell, another beginning the process instantly. It amused Abel Keeling to watch them. Why (he wondered) were all the drops the same size? What cause and compulsion did they obey that they never varied, and what frail tenuity held the little globules intact? It must be due to some Cause. . . . He remembered that the aromatic gum of the wild frankincense with which they had parcelled the seams had hung on the buckets in great sluggish gouts, obedient to a different compulsion; oil was different again, and so were juices and balsams. Only quicksilver (perhaps the heavy and motionless sea put him in mind of quicksilver) seemed obedient to no law. . . . Why was it so?

Bligh, of course, would have had his explanation; it was the Hand of God. That sufficed for Bligh, who had gone

forward the evening before, and whom Abel Keeling now seemed vaguely and as at a distance to remember as the deep-voiced fanatic who had sung his hymns as, man by man, he had committed the bodies of the ship's company to the deep. Bligh was that sort of man; accepted things without question; was content to take things as they were and be ready with the fenders when the wall of rock rose out of the opalescent mists. Bligh too, like the waterdrops, had his Law, that was his and nobody else's. . . .

There floated down from some rotten top up aloft, a flake of scurf, that settled in the pipkin. Abel Keeling watched it dully as it settled towards the pipkin's rim. When presently he again dipped his fingers into the vessel the water ran into a little vortex, drawing the flake with it. The water settled again; and again the minute flake, determined towards the rim and adhered there, as if the rim had power to draw it. . . .

It was exactly so that the galleon was gliding towards the wall of rock, the yellow and green weeds, and the monkeys and parrots. Put out into mid-water again (while there had been men to put her out) she had glided to the other wall. One force drew the chip in the pipkin and the ship over the tranced sea. It was the Hand of God, said Bligh. . . .

Abel Keeling, his mind now noting minute things and now clouded with torpor, did not at first hear a voice that was quakingly lifted up over by the forecandle—a voice that drew nearer, to an accompaniment of swirling water.

*“O Thou, that Jonas in the fish
Three days didst keep from pain,
Which was a figure of Thy death
And rising up again—*

It was Bligh singing one of his hymns :

*“O Thou, that Noah keptst from flood
And Abram, day by day,
As he along through Egypt passed,
Didst guide him in the way—”*

The voice ceased, leaving the pious period uncompleted. Bligh was alive, at any rate. . . . Abel Keeling resumed his fitful musing.

Yes, that was the Law of Bligh's life, to call things the

Hand of God; but Abel Keeling's Law was different; no better, no worse, only different. The Hand of God, that drew chips and galleons, must work by some method; and Abel Keeling's eyes were dully on the pipkin again as if he sought the method there. . . .

Then conscious thought left him for a space, and when he resumed it was without obvious connection.

Oars, of course, were the thing. With oars, men could laugh at calms. Oars, that only pinnaces and galliasses now used, had had their advantages.

But oars (which was to say a method, for you could say if you liked that the Hand of God grasped the oar-loom, as the Breath of God filled the sail)—oars were antiquated, belonged to the past, and meant a throwing-over of all that was good and new and a return to line lines, a battle-formation abreast to give effect to the shock of the ram, and a day or two at sea and then to port again for provisions. Oars . . . no. Abel Keeling was one of the new men, the men who swore by the line-ahead, the broadside fire of sakers and demi-cannon, and weeks and months without a landfall. Perhaps one day the wits of such men as he would devise a craft, not oar-driven (because oars could not penetrate into the remote seas of the world)—not sail-driven (because men who trusted to sails found themselves in an airless, three-mile strait, suspended motionless between cloud and water, ever gliding to a wall of rock)—but a ship . . . a ship. . . .

*"To Noah and his sons with him
God spake, and thus said He:
A cov'nant set I up with you
And your posterity——"*

It was Bligh again, wandering somewhere in the waist. Abel Keeling's mind was once more a blank. Then slowly, slowly, as the water drops collected on the collar of rope, his thought took shape again.

A galliasse? No, not a galliasse. The galliasse made shift to be two things, and was neither. This ship, that the hand of man should one day make for the Hand of God to manage, should be a ship that should take and conserve the force of the wind, take it and store it as she stored her victuals; and rest when she wished, going ahead when she wished;

turning the forces both of calm and storm against themselves. For, of course, the force must be wind—stored wind—a bag of the winds, as the children's tale had it—wind probably directed upon the water astern, driving it away and urging forward the ship, acting by reaction. She would have a wind-chamber, into which wind would be pumped with pumps. Bligh would call that equally the Hand of God, this driving-force of the ship of the future that Abel Keeling dimly foreshadowed as he lay between the mainmast and the belfry, turning his eyes now and then from ashy white timbers to the vivid green bronze-rust of the bell above him. . . .

Bligh's face, liver-coloured with the sun and ravaged from inwards by the faith that consumed him, appeared at the head of the quarter-deck steps. His voice beat uncontrolledly out.

*"And in the earth here is 'no place
Of refuge to be found,
Nor in the deep and water-course
That passeth under ground——"*

II

Bligh's eyes were lidded, as if in contemplation of his inner ecstasy. His head was thrown back, and his brows worked up and down tormentedly. His wide mouth remained open as his hymn was suddenly interrupted on the long-drawn note. From somewhere in the shimmering mists the note was taken up, and there drummed and rang and reverberated through the strait a windy, hoarse, and dismal bellow, alarming and sustained. A tremor ran through Bligh. Moving like a sightless man, he stumbled forward from the head of the quarter-deck steps, and Abel Keeling was aware of his gaunt figure behind him, taller for the steepness of the deck. As that vast empty sound died away, Bligh laughed in his mania.

"Lord, hath the grave's wide mouth a tongue to praise Thee? Lo, again——"

Again the cavernous sound possessed the air, louder and nearer. Through it came another sound, a slow throb, throb—throb, throb—Again the sounds ceased.

"Even the Leviathan lifted up his voice in praise!" Bligh sobbed.

Abel Keeling did not raise his head. There had returned to him the memory of that day when, before the morning mists had lifted from the strait, he had emptied the pipkin of the water that was the allowance until night should fall again. During that agony of thirst he had seen shapes and heard sounds with other than his mortal eyes and ears, and even in the moments that had alternated with his lightness, when he had known these to be hallucinations, they had come again. He had heard the bells on a Sunday in his own Kentish home, the calling of children at play, the unconcerned singing of men at their daily labour, and the laughter and gossip of the women as they had spread the linen on the hedge or distributed bread upon the platters. These voices had rung in his brain, interrupted now and then by the groans of Bligh and of two other men who had been alive then.

Some of the voices he had heard had been silent on earth this many a long year, but Abel Keeling, thirst-tortured, had heard them, even as he was now hearing that vacant moaning with the intermittent throbbing that filled the strait with alarm. . . .

"Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him!" Bligh was calling deliriously.

Then a bell seemed to sound in Abel Keeling's ears, and, as if something in the mechanism of his brain had slipped, another picture rose in his fancy—the scene when the *Mary of the Tower* had put out, to a bravery of swinging bells and shrill fifes and valiant trumpets. She had not been a leper-white galleon then. The scroll-work on her prow had twinkled with gilding; her belfry and stern-galleries and elaborate lanterns had flashed in the sun with gold; and her fighting-tops and the warpavasse about her waist had been gay with painted coats and scutcheons. To her sails had been stitched gaudy ramping lions of scarlet say, and from her mainyard, now dipping in the water, had hung the broad two-tailed pennant with the Virgin and Child embroidered upon it. . . .

Then suddenly a voice about him seemed to be saying, "*And a half-seven—and a half-seven—*" and in a twink the picture in Abel Keeling's brain changed again. He was at

home again, instructing his son, young Abel, in the casting of the lead from the skiff they had pulled out of the harbour.

"*And a half-seven!*" the boy seemed to be calling.

Abel Keeling's blackened lips muttered: "Excellently well cast, Abel, excellently well cast!"

"*And a half-seven—and a half-seven—seven—seven——*"

"Ah," Abel Keeling murmured, "that last was not a clear cast—give me the line—thus it should go . . . ay, so Soon you shall sail the seas with me in the *Mary of the Tower*. You are already perfect in the stars and the motions of the planets; to-morrow I will instruct you in the use of the backstaff. . . ."

For a minute or two he continued to mutter; then he dozed. When again he came to semi-consciousness it was once more to the sound of bells, at first faint, then louder, and finally becoming a noisy clamour immediately above his head. It was Bligh. Bligh, in a fresh attack of delirium, had seized the bell-lanyard and was ringing the bell insanely. The cord broke in his fingers, but he thrust at the bell with his hand, and again called aloud:

"Upon an harp and an instrument of ten strings . . . let Heaven and Earth praise Thy Name! . . ."

He continued to call aloud, and to beat on the bronze-rusted bell.

"*Ship ahoy! What ship's that?*"

One would have said that a veritable hail had come out of the mists; but Abel Keeling knew those hails that came out of the mists. They came from ships which were not there. "Ay, ay, keep a good look-out, and have a care to your lode-manager," he muttered again to his son. . . .

But, as sometimes a sleeper sits up in his dream, or rises from his couch and walks, so all of a sudden Abel Keeling found himself on his hands and knees on the deck, looking back over his shoulder. In some deep-seated region of his consciousness he was dimly aware that the cant of the deck had become more perilous, but his brain received the intelligence and forgot it again. He was looking out into the bright and baffling mists. The buckler of the sun was of a more ardent silver; the sea below it was lost in brilliant evaporation; and between them, suspended in the haze, no more substantial than the vague darknesses that float before dazzled eyes, a pyramidal phantom-shape hung. Abel Keeling

passed his hand over his eyes, but when he removed it the shape was still there, gliding slowly towards the *Mary's* quarter. Its form changed as he watched it. The spirit-grey shape that had been a pyramid seemed to dissolve into four upright members, slightly graduated in tallness, that nearest the *Mary's* stern the tallest and that to the left the lowest. It might have been the shadow of the gigantic set of reed-pipes on which that vacant mournful note had been sounded.

And as he looked, with fooled eyes, again his ears became fooled :

"*Aboy there ! What ship's that ? Are you a ship ? . . . Here, give me that trumpet——*" Then a metallic barking. "*Aboy there ! What the devil are you ? Didn't you ring a bell ? Ring it again, or blow a blast or something, and go dead slow !*"

All this came, as it were, indistinctly, and through a sort of high singing in Abel Keeling's own ears. Then he fancied a short bewildered laugh, followed by a colloquy from somewhere between sea and sky.

"*Here, Ward, just pinch me, will you ? Tell me what you see there. I want to know if I'm awake.*"

"*See where ?*"

"*There on the starboard bow. (Stop that ventilating fan ; I can't bear myself think.) See anything ? Don't tell me it's that damned Dutchman—don't pitch me that old Vanderdecken tale—give me an easy one first, something about a sea-serpent . . . You did hear that bell, didn't you ?*"

"*Shut up a minute—listen——*"

Again Bligh's voice was lifted up.

"*This is the cov'nant that I make :
From henceforth nevermore
Will I again the world destroy
With water, as before.*"

Bligh's voice died away again in Abel Keeling's ears.

"*Oh—my—fat—Aunt—Julia !*" the voice that seemed to come from between sea and sky sounded again. Then it spoke more loudly. "*I say,*" it began with careful politeness, "*if you are a ship, do you mind telling me where the masquerade is to be ? Our wireless is out of order, and we hadn't heard of it. . . . Oh, you do see it. Ward, don't you ? . . . Please, please tell us what the hell you are !*"

Again Abel Keeling had moved as a sleep-walker moves,

He had raised himself up by the belfry timbers, and Bligh had sunk in a heap on the deck. Abel Keeling's movement overturned the pipkin, which raced the little trickle of its contents down the deck and lodged where the still and brimming sea made, as it were, a chain with the carved balustrade of the quarter-deck—one link a still gleaming edge, then a dark baluster, and then another gleaming link. For one moment only Abel Keeling found himself noticing that that which had driven Bligh aft had been the rising of the water in the waist as the galleon settled by the head—the waist was now entirely submerged; then once more he was absorbed in his dream, its voices, and its shape in the mist, which had again taken the form of a pyramid before his eyeballs.

"Of course," a voice seemed to be complaining anew, and still through that confused dinning in Abel Keeling's ears, "*we can't turn a four-inch on it . . . And, of course, Ward, I don't believe in 'em. D'you hear, Ward? I don't believe in 'em, I say . . . Shall we call down to old A.B.? This might interest His Scientific Skippership . . .*"

"Oh, lower a boat and pull out to it—into it—over it—through it——"

"Look at our chaps crowded on the barbette yonder. They've seen it. Better not give an order you know won't be obeyed . . ."

Abel Keeling, cramped against the antique belfry, had begun to find his dream interesting. For, though he did not know her build, that mirage was the shape of a ship. No doubt it was projected from his brooding on ships of half an hour before: and that was odd . . . But, perhaps, after all, it was not very odd. He knew that she did not really exist; only the appearance of her existed; but things had to exist like that before they really existed. Before the *Mary of the Tower* had existed she had been a shape in some man's imagination; before that, some dreamer had dreamed the form of a ship with oars; and before that, far away in the dawn and infancy of the world, some seer had seen in a vision the raft before man had ventured to push out over the water on his two planks. And since this shape that rode before Abel Keeling's eyes was a shape in his, Abel Keeling's dream, he, Abel Keeling, was the master of it. His own brooding brain had contrived her, and she was launched upon the illimitable ocean of his own mind. . . .

*"And I will not unmindful be
Of this, My cov'nant, passed
'Twixt Me and you and every flesh
Whiles that the world should last."*

sang Bligh, rapt . . .

But as a dreamer, even in his dream, will scratch upon the wall by his couch some key or word to put him in mind of his vision on the morrow when it has left him, so Abel Keeling found himself seeking some sign to be a proof to those to whom no vision is vouchsafed. Even Bligh sought that—could not be silent in his bliss, but lay on the deck there, uttering great passionate Amens and praising his Maker as he said, upon an harp and an instrument of ten strings. So with Abel Keeling. It would be the Amen of his life to have praised God, not upon a harp, but upon a ship that should carry her own power, that should store wind or its equivalent as she stored her victuals, that should be something wrested from the chaos of uninvention and ordered and disciplined and subordinated to Abel Keeling's will . . . And there she was, that ship-shaped thing of spirit-grey, with the four pipes that resembled a phantom organ now broadside and of equal length. And the ghost-crew of that ship were speaking again . . .

The interrupted silver chain by the quarter-deck balustrade had now become continuous, and the balusters made a herring-bone over their own motionless reflections. The spilt water from the pipkin had dried, and the pipkin was not to be seen. Abel Keeling stood beside the mast, erect as God made man to go.

With his leathery hand he smote upon the bell. He waited for the space of a minute, and then cried :

"Ahoy ! . . . Ship ahoy ! . . . What ship's that ?"

III

We are not conscious in a dream that we are playing a game the beginning and end of which are in ourselves. In this dream of Abel Keeling's a voice replied :

"Hollo, it's found it's tongue. . . . Ahoy there ! What are you ?"

Loudly and in a clear voice Abel Keeling called : " Are you a ship ? "

With a nervous giggle the answer came :

" *We are a ship, arn't we, Ward ? I hardly feel sure. . . . Yes, of course, we're a ship. No question about us. The question is what the dickens you are.* "

Not all the words these voices used were intelligible to Abel Keeling, and he knew not what it was in the tone of these last words that reminded him of the honour due to the *Mary of the Tower*. Blister-white and at the end of her life as she was, Abel Keeling was still jealous of her dignity ; the voice had a youngish ring ; and it was not fitting that young chins should be wagged about his galleon. He spoke curtly.

" You that spoke—are you the master of that ship ? "

" *Officer of the watch,*" the words floated back ; " *the captain's below.* "

" Then send for him. It is with masters that masters hold speech," Abel Keeling replied.

He could see the two shapes, flat and without relief, standing on a high narrow structure with rails. One of them gave a low whistle, and seemed to be fanning his face ; but the other rumbled something into a sort of funnel. Presently the two shapes became three. There was a murmuring, as of a consultation, and then suddenly a new voice spoke. At its thrill and tone a sudden tremor ran through Abel Keeling's frame. He wondered what response it was that that voice found in the forgotten recesses of his memory.

" *A'oy !* " seemed to call this new yet faintly remembered voice. " *What's all this about ? Listen. We're His Majesty's destroyer Seapink, out of Devonport last October, and nothing particular the matter with us. Now who are you ?* "

" The *Mary of the Tower*, out of the Port of Rye on the day of Saint Anne, and only two men—— "

A gasp interrupted him.

" *Out of WHERE ?* " that voice that so strangely moved Abel Keeling said unsteadily, while Bligh broke into groans of renewed rapture.

" Out of the Port of Rye, in the County of Sussex . . . nay, give ear, else I cannot make you hear me while this man's spirit and flesh wrestle so together ! . . . Ahoy ! Are

you gone?" For the voices had become a low murmur, and the ship-shape had faded before Abel Keeling's eyes. Again and again he called. He wished to be informed of the disposition and economy of the wind-chamber. . . .

"The wind-chamber!" he called, in an agony lest the knowledge almost within his grasp should be lost. "I would know about the wind-chamber. . . ."

Like an echo there came back the words, uncomprehendingly uttered, "*The wind-chamber? . . .*"

" . . . that driveth the vessel—perchance 'tis not wind—a steel bow that is bent also conserveth force—the force you store, to move at will through calm and storm. . . ."

"*Can you make out what it's driving at?*"

"*Oh, we shall all wake up in a minute. . . .*"

"*Quite, I have it; the engines; it wants to know about our engines. It'll be wanting to see our papers presently. Rye Port! . . . Well, no harm in humouring it; let's see what it can make of this. Aboy there!*" came the voice to Abel Keeling, a little strongly, as if a shifting wind carried it, and speaking faster and faster as it went on. "*Not wind, but steam; d'you hear? Steam, steam. Steam in eight Yarrow water-tube boilers. S-t-e-a-m, steam. Got it? And we've twin-screw triple expansion engines, indicated horse-power four thousand, and we can do 430 revolutions per minute; savvy? Is there anything your phantomhood would like to know about our armament? . . .*"

Abel Keeling was muttering fretfully to himself. It annoyed him that words in his own vision should have no meaning for him. How did words come to him in a dream that he had no knowledge of when wide awake? The Scapink—that was the name of this ship; but a pink was long and narrow—low-cargéd and square-built aft. . . .

"*And as for our armament,*" the voice with the tones that so profoundly troubled Abel Keeling's memory continued, "*we've two revolving Whitehead torpedo-tubes, three six-pounders on the upper deck, and that's a twelve-pounder forward there by the conning-tower. I forgot to mention that we're nickel steel, with a coal capacity of sixty tons in most damnably placed bunkers, and that thirty and a quarter knots is about our top. Care to come aboard?*"

But the voice was speaking still more rapidly and feverishly, as if to fill a silence with no matter what, and the shape that was uttering it was straining forward anxiously over the rail.

"Ugh! But I'm glad this happened in the daylight," another voice was muttering.

"I wish I was sure it was happening at all . . . Poor old spook!"

"I suppose it would keep its feet if her deck was quite vertical. Think she'll go down, or just melt?"

"Kind of go down . . . without wash . . ."

"Listen—here's the other one now——"

For Bligh was singing again:

"For, Lord, Thou know'st our nature such
If we great things obtain,
And in the getting of the same
Do feel no grief or pain,

"We little do esteem thereof;
But, hardly brought to pass,
A thousand times we do esteem
More than the other was."

"But oh, look—look—look at the other! . . . Oh, I say, wasn't he a grand boy! Look!"

For, transfiguring Abel Keeling's form as a prophet's form is transfigured in the instant of his rapture, flooding his brain with the white eureka-light of perfect knowledge, that for which he and his dream had been at a standstill had come. He knew her, this ship of the future, as if God's finger had bitten her lines into his brain. He knew her as those already sinking into the grave know things, miraculously, completely, accepting Life's impossibilities with a nodded "Of course." From the ardent mouths of her eight furnaces to the last drip from her lubricators, from her bed-plates to the breeches of her quick-firers, he knew her—read her gauges, thumbed her bearings, gave the ranges from her range-finders, and lived the life he lived who was in command of her. And he would not forget on the morrow, as he had forgotten on many morrows, for at last he had seen the water about his feet, and knew that there would be no morrow for him in this world. . . .

And even in that moment, with but a sand or two to run in his glass, indomitable, insatiable, dreaming dream on

dream, he could not die until he knew more. He had two questions to ask, and a master-question; but a moment remained. Sharply his voice rang out.

"Ho, there! . . . This ancient ship, the *Mary of the Towers*, cannot steam thirty and a quarter knots, but yet she can sail the waters. What more does your ship? Can she soar above them, as the fowls of the air soar?"

"Lord, he thinks we're an airplane! . . . No, she can't. . . ."

"And can you dive, even as the fishes of the deep?"

"No. . . . Those are submarines . . . we aren't a submarine. . . ."

But Abel Keeling waited for no more. He gave an exulting chuckle.

"Oho, oho—thirty knots, and but on the face of the waters—no more than that? Oho! . . . Now *my* ship, the ship I see as a mother sees full-grown the child she has but conceived—*my* ship, I say—oho!—*my* ship shall . . . Below there—trip that gun!"

The cry came suddenly and alertly, as a muffled sound came from below and an ominous tremor shook the galleon.

"*By Jove, her guns are breaking loose below—that's her finish—*"

"Trip that gun, and double-breech the others!" Abel Keeling's voice rang out, as if there had been any to obey him. He had braced himself within the belfry frame; and then in the middle of the next order his voice suddenly failed him. His ship-shape, that for the moment he had forgotten, rode once more before his eyes. This was the end, and his master-question, apprehension for the answer to which was now torturing his face and well-nigh bursting his heart, was still unasked.

"Ho—he that spoke with me—the master," he cried in a voice that ran high, "is he there?"

"Yes, yes!" came the other voice across the water, sick with suspense. "*Oh, be quick!*"

There was a moment in which hoarse cries from many voices, a heavy thud and rumble of wood, and a crash of timbers and a gurgle and a splash were indescribably mingled; the gun under which Abel Keeling had lain had snapped her rotten breechings and plunged down the deck, carrying Bligh's unconscious form with it. The deck came up vertical, and for one instant longer Abel Keeling clung to the belfry.

"I cannot see your face," he screamed, "but meseems your voice is a voice I know. *What is your name?*"

In a torn sob the answer came across the water :

"Keeling—Abel Keeling. . . Ob, my God !"

And Abel Keeling's cry of triumph, that mounted to a victorious "Huzza !" was lost in the downward plunge of the *Mary of the Tower*, that left the strait empty save for the sun's fiery blaze and the last smoke-like evaporation of the mists.

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

The Mummy's Foot

THE MUMMY'S FOOT

I HAD entered, in an idle mood, the shop of one of those curiosity vendors who are called *marchands de bric-à-brac* in that Parisian argot which is so perfectly unintelligible elsewhere in France.

The warehouse of my *bric-à-brac* dealer was a veritable Capharnaum; all ages and all nations seemed to have made their rendezvous there; an Etruscan lamp of red clay stood upon a Boule cabinet, with ebony panels, brightly striped by lines of inlaid brass; a duchess of the court of Louis XV nonchalantly extended her tawn-like feet under a massive table of the time of Louis XII with heavy spiral supports of oak, and carven designs of chimeras and foliage intermingled.

From disembowelled cabinets escaped cascades of silver-lustrous Chinese silks and waves of tinsel, which an oblique sunbeam shot through with luminous beads; while portraits of every era, in frames more or less tarnished, smiled through their yellow varnish.

The dealer followed me closely through the tortuous way contrived between the piles of furniture.

It was a singular face, that of the merchant. An immense skull, polished like a knee, and surrounded by a thin aureole of white hair, which brought out the clear salmon tint of his complexion all the more strikingly, lent him a false aspect of patriarchial *bombomie*, counteracted, however, by the scintillation of two little yellow eyes which trembled in their orbits like two louis d'or upon quicksilver.

The curve of his nose presented an aquiline silhouette which suggested the Oriental or Jewish type. His hands—thin, slender, full of nerves which projected like strings upon the finger-board of a violin, and armed with claws like those on the terminations of bats' wings—shook with senile trembling; but those convulsively agitated hands became firmer than steel pincers or lobsters' claws when

they lifted any precious article—an onyx cup, a Venetian glass, or a dish of Bohemian crystal. This strange old man had an aspect so thoroughly rabbinical and cabalistic that he would have been burnt on the mere testimony of his face three centuries ago.

“Will you not buy something from me to-day, sir? Here is a Malay krees with blade undulating like flame; look at those grooves contrived for the blood to run along—it is a fine character of ferocious arm, and will look well in your collection: this two-handed sword is very beautiful—it is the work of Josepe de la Hera; and this *colichemarde*, with its fenestrated guard—what a superb specimen of handicraft!”

“No; I have quite enough weapons and instruments of carnage—I want a small figure, something which will suit me as a paper-weight; for I cannot endure those trumpery bronzes which the stationers sell, and which may be found on everybody’s desk.”

The old gnome foraged among his ancient wares, and finally arranged before me some antique bronzes—so-called, at least; fragments of malachite; little Hindoo or Chinese idols—a kind of poussah toys in jade-stone, representing the incarnations of Brahma or Vishnoo, and wonderfully appropriate to the very undivine office of holding papers and letters in place.

I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon, all constellated with warts—its mouth formidable with bristling tusks and ranges of teeth—and an abominable little Mexican fetish, representing the god Zitziliputzi *au naturel*, when I caught sight of a charming foot, which I at first took for a fragment of some antique Venus.

It had those beautiful ruddy and tawny tints that lend to Florentine bronze that warm living look so much preferable to the grey-green aspect of common bronzes, which might easily be mistaken for statues in a state of putrefaction: satiny gleams played over its rounded forms, doubtless polished by the amorous kisses of twenty centuries.

“That foot will be my choice,” I said to the merchant, who regarded me with an ironical and saturnine air, and held out the object desired that I might examine it more fully.

I was surprised at its lightness; it was not a foot of metal, but in sooth a foot of flesh—an embalmed foot—a mummy’s foot: on examining it still more closely the very grain of

the skin, and the almost imperceptible lines impressed upon it by the texture of the bandages, became perceptible.

The toes were slender and delicate, and terminated by perfectly formed nails, pure and transparent as agates; the great toe, slightly separated from the rest, afforded a happy contrast, in the antique style to the position of the other toes, and lent it in aerial lightness—the grace of a bird's foot—the sole, scarcely streaked by a few almost imperceptible cross lines, afforded evidence that it had never touched the bare ground, and had only come in contact with the finest matting of Nile rushes, and the softest carpets of panther skin.

“Ha, ha!—you want the foot of the Princess Hermonthis,”—exclaimed the merchant, with a strange giggle, fixing his owl eyes upon me—“ha, ha, ha!—for a paper-weight!—an original idea!—artistic idea! Old Pharaoh would certainly have been surprised had someone told him that the foot of his adored daughter would be used for a paper-weight after he had had a mountain of granite hollowed out as a receptacle for the triple coffin, painted and gilded—covered with hieroglyphics and beautiful paintings of the Judgment of Souls,”—continued the queer little merchant, half audibly, as though talking to himself!

“How much will you charge me for this mummy fragment?”

“Ah, the highest price I can get; for it is a superb piece.”

“Assuredly that is not a common article; but, still, how much do you want? In the first place let me warn you that all my wealth consists of just five louis: I can buy anything that costs five louis, but nothing dearer.”

“Five louis for the foot of the Princess Hermonthis! that is very little, very little indeed; 'tis an authentic foot,” muttered the merchant, shaking his head, and imparting a peculiar rotatory motion to his eyes. “Well, take it, and I will give you the bandages into the bargain,” he added, wrapping the foot in an ancient damask rag.”

He poured the gold coins into a sort of mediæval alms-purse hanging at his belt, repeating:

“The foot of the Princess Hermonthis, to be used for a paper-weight!”

Then turning his phosphorescent eyes upon me, he exclaimed in a voice strident as the crying of a cat which has swallowed a fishbone:

"Old Pharaoh will not be well pleased; he loved his daughter—the dear man!"

"You speak as if you were a contemporary of his: you are old enough, goodness knows! but you do not date back to the Pyramids of Egypt," I answered, laughingly, from the threshold.

I went home, delighted with my acquisition.

With the idea of putting it to profitable use as soon as possible, I placed the foot of the divine Princess Hermonthis upon a heap of papers scribbled over with verses, in themselves an undecipherable mosaic work of erasures; articles freshly begun; letters forgotten. The effect was charming, bizarre, and romantic.

Well satisfied with this embellishment, I went out with the gravity and pride becoming one who feels that he has the ineffable advantage over all the passers-by whom he elbows, of possessing a piece of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of Pharaoh.

I looked upon all who did not possess, like myself, a paper-weight so authentically Egyptian, as very ridiculous people; and it seemed to me that the proper occupation of every sensible man should consist in the mere fact of having a mummy's foot upon his desk.

Happily I met some friends whose presence distracted me in my infatuation with this new acquisition: I went to dinner with them.

When I came back that evening, with my brain slightly confused by a few glasses of wine, a vague whiff of Oriental perfume delicately titillated my olfactory nerves: the heat of the room had warmed the natron, bitumen, and myrrh in which the *paraschistes*, who cut open the bodies of the dead, had bathed the corpse of the princess;—it was a perfume at once sweet and penetrating—a perfume that four thousand years had not been able to dissipate.

I soon drank deeply from the black cup of sleep: for a few hours all remained opaque to me.

Yet light gradually dawned upon the darkness of my mind; dreams commenced to touch me softly in their silent flight.

The eyes of my soul were opened; and I beheld my chamber as it actually was; I might have believed myself awake but for a vague consciousness which assured me that I slept and that something fantastic was about to take place.

The odour of the myrrh had augmented in intensity : and I felt a slight headache, which I very naturally attributed to several glasses of champagne that we had drunk to the unknown gods and our future fortunes.

I peered through my room with a feeling of expectation which I saw nothing to justify : every article of furniture was in its proper place.

After a few moments, however, all this calm interior appeared to become disturbed ; the woodwork cracked stealthily ; the ash-covered log suddenly emitted a jet of blue flame.

My eyes accidentally fell upon the desk where I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis.

Instead of remaining quiet—as behoved a foot which had been embalmed for four thousand years—it commenced to act in a nervous manner ; contracted itself, and leaped over the papers like a startled frog. One would have imagined that it had suddenly been brought into contact with a galvanic battery : I could distinctly hear the dry sound made by its little heel, hard as the hoof of a gazelle.

Suddenly I saw the folds of my bed-curtain stir, and heard a bumping sound, like that caused by some person hopping on one foot across the floor. I must confess I became alternately hot and cold ; that I felt a strange wind chill my back.

The bed-curtains opened and I beheld the strangest figure imaginable before me.

It was a young girl of a very deep coffee-brown complexion, like the bayadere Amani, and possessing the purest Egyptian type of perfect beauty : her eyes were almond shaped and oblique, with eyebrows so black that they seemed blue ; her nose was exquisitely chiselled, almost Greek in its delicacy of outline ; and she might indeed have been taken for a Corinthian statue of bronze but for the prominence of her cheekbones and the slightly African fullness of her lips.

Her arms, slender and spindle-shaped, like those of very young girls, were encircled by a peculiar kind of metal bands and bracelets of glass beads ; her hair was all twisted into little cords, and she wore upon her bosom a little idol-figure of green paste, bearing a whip with seven lashes, which proved it to be an image of Isis. Her brow was adorned with a shining plate of gold, and a few traces of paint relieved the coppery tint of her cheeks.

As for her costume, it was very odd indeed.

Fancy a *pagne* or skirt all formed of little strips of material bedizened with red and black hieroglyphics, stiffened with bitumen, and apparently belonging to a freshly unbandaged mummy.

In one of those sudden flights of thought so common in dreams I heard the hoarse falsetto of the *bric-a-brac* dealer repeating like a monotonous refrain the phrase he had uttered in his shop with so enigmatical an intonation :

"Old Pharaoh will not be well pleased: he loved his daughter, the dear man !"

One strange circumstance, which was not at all calculated to restore my equanimity, was that the apparition had but one foot ; the other was broken off at the ankle !

She approached the table where the foot was starting and fidgeting about more than ever, and there supported herself upon the edge of the desk. I saw her eyes fill with pearly-gleaming tears.

Although she had not as yet spoken, I fully comprehended the thoughts which agitated her: she looked at her foot—for it was indeed her own—with an exquisitely graceful expression of coquettish sadness ; but the foot leaped and ran hither and thither, as though impelled on steel springs.

Then commenced between the Princess Hermonthis and her foot—which appeared to be endowed with a special life of its own—a very fantastic dialogue in a most ancient Coptic tongue, such as might have been spoken thirty centuries ago in the syrxes of the land of Ser: luckily, I understood Coptic perfectly well that night.

The Princess Hermonthis cried, in a voice sweet and vibrant as the tones of a crystal bell :

"Well, my dear little foot, you always flee from me ; yet I always took good care of you, I bathed you with perfumed water in a bowl of alabaster ; I smoothed your heel with pumice-stone mixed with palm oil ; your nails were cut with golden scissors and polished with a hippopotamus tooth ; I was careful to select *tatbebs* for you, painted and embroidered and turned up at the toes, which were the envy of all the young girls in Egypt: you wore on your toe rings bearing the device of the sacred scarabæus ; and you supported one of the lightest bodies that a lazy foot could sustain."

The foot replied, in a pouting and chagrined tone :

"You know well that I do not belong to myself any longer—I have been bought and paid for; the old merchant knew what he was about; he bore you a grudge for having refused to espouse him;—this is an ill turn which he has done you. The Arab who violated your royal coffin in the subterranean pits of the necropolis of Thebes was sent thither by him: he desired to prevent you from being present at the reunion of the shadowy nations in the cities below. Have you five pieces of gold for my ransom?"

"Alas, no!—my jewels, my rings, my purses of gold and silver, they were all stolen from me," answered the Princess Hermonthis, with a sob.

"Princess," I then exclaimed, "I never retained anybody's foot unjustly;—even though you have not got the five louis which it cost me, I present it to you gladly: I should feel unutterably wretched to think that I were the cause of so amiable a person as the Princess Hermonthis being lame."

She turned a look of deepest gratitude upon me; and her eyes shone with bluish gleams of light.

She took her foot—which surrendered itself willingly this time—like a woman about to put on her little shoe, and adjusted it to her leg with much skill.

This operation over, she took a few steps about the room, as though to assure herself that she was really no longer lame.

"Ah, how pleased my father will be!—he who was so unhappy because of my mutilation, and who from the moment of my birth set a whole nation at work to hollow me out a tomb so deep that he might preserve me intact until that last day when souls must be weighed in the balance of Amenthi! Come with me to my father;—he will receive you kindly; for you have given me back my foot."

I thought this proposition natural enough. I arrayed myself in a dressing-gown of large-flowered pattern, which lent me a very Pharanoic aspect; hurriedly put on a pair of Turkish slippers, and informed the Princess Hermonthis that I was ready to follow her.

Before starting, Hermonthis took from her neck the little idol of green paste, and laid it on the scattered sheets of paper which covered the table.

"It is only fair," she observed smilingly, "that I should replace your paper-weight."

She gave me her hand, which felt soft and cold, like the skin of a serpent ; and we departed.

We passed for some time with the velocity of an arrow through a fluid and greyish expanse, in which half-formed silhouettes flitted swiftly by us, to right and left.

For an instant we saw only sky and sea.

A few moments later obelisks commenced to tower in the distance : pylons and vast flights of steps guarded by sphinxes became clearly outlined against the horizon.

We had reached our destination.

The princess conducted me to the mountain of rose-coloured granite, in the face of which appeared an opening so narrow and low that it would have been difficult to distinguish it from the fissures in the rock had not its location been marked by two stele wrought with sculptures.

Hermonthis kindled a torch, and led the way before me.

We traversed corridors hewn through the living rock : their walls, covered with hieroglyphics and paintings of allegorical processions, might well have occupied thousands of arms for thousands of years in their formation ;—these corridors, of interminable length, opened into square chambers, in the midst of which pits had been contrived, through which we descended by cramp-irons or spiral stair-ways ;—these pits again conducted us into other chambers, opening into other corridors, likewise decorated with painted sparrow-hawks, serpents coiled in circles.

At last we found ourselves in a hall so vast, so enormous, so immeasurable, that the eye could not reach its limits ; files of monstrous columns stretched far out of sight on every side, between which winkled livid stars of yellowish flame.

The Princess Hermonthis still held my hand and graciously saluted the mummies of her acquaintance.

My eyes became accustomed to the dim twilight, and objects became discernible.

I beheld the kings of the subterranean races seated upon thrones—grand old men, though dry, withered, wrinkled like parchment, and blackened with naphtha and bitumen—all wearing *psbents* of gold, and breastplates and gorgets glittering with precious stones ; their eyes immovably fixed like the eyes of sphinxes, and their long beards whitened by the snow of centuries. Behind them stood their peoples, in the stiff and constrained posture enjoined by Egyptian art,

all eternally preserving the attitude prescribed by the hieratic code. Behind these nations, the cats, ibises, and crocodiles contemporary with them—rendered monstrous of aspect by their swathing bands—mewed, flapped their wings, or extended their jaws in a saurian giggle.

All the Pharaohs were there—Cheops, Chephrenes, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenotaph—all the dark rulers of the pyramids and syringes ;—on yet higher thrones sat Chronos and Xixouthros—who was contemporary with the deluge ; and Tubal Cain, who reigned before it.

The beard of King Xixouthros had grown seven times around the granite table upon which he leaned, lost in deep reverie—and buried in dreams.

Further back, through a dusty cloud, I beheld dimly the seventy-two pre-Adamite Kings, with their seventy-two peoples—forever passed away.

After permitting me to gaze upon this bewildering spectacle a few moments, the Princess Hermonthis presented me to her father Pharaoh, who favoured me with a most gracious nod.

"I have found my foot again !—I have found my foot ! " cried the Princess, clapping her little hands together with every sign of frantic joy. " It was this gentleman who restored it to me."

The races of Kemi, the races of Nahasi—all the black, bronzed, and copper-coloured nations repeated in chorus :

"The Princess Hermonthis has found her foot again ! "

Even Xixouthros himself was visibly affected.

He raised his heavy eyelids, stroked his moustache with his fingers, and turned upon me a glance weighty with centuries.

"By Oms, the dog of Hell, and Tinei, daughter of the Sun and of Truth ! this is a brave and worthy lad ! " explained Pharaoh, pointing to me with his sceptre, which was terminated with a lotus-flower.

"What recompense do you desire ? "

Filled with that daring inspired by dreams in which nothing seems impossible, I asked him for the hand of the Princess Hermonthis ;—the hand seemed to me a very proper anti-*thetic* recompense for the foot.

Pharaoh opened wide his great eyes of glass in astonishment at my witty request.

"What country do you come from? and what is your age?"

"I am a Frenchman; and I am twenty-seven years old, venerable Pharaoh."

"—Twenty-seven years old! and he wishes to espouse the Princess Hermonthis who is thirty centuries old!" cried out at once all the Thrones and all the Circles of Nations.

Only Hermonthis herself did not seem to think my request unreasonable.

"If you were even only two thousand years old," replied the ancient King, "I would willingly give you the Princess; but the disproportion is too great; and, besides, we must give our daughters husbands who will last well; you do not know how to preserve yourselves any longer; even those who died only fifteen centuries ago are already no more than a handful of dust;—behold! my flesh is solid as basalt; my bones are bars of steel!

"I shall be present on the last day of the world, with the same body and the same features which I had during my lifetime; my daughter Hermonthis will last longer than a statue of bronze.

"Then the last particles of your dust will have been scattered abroad by the winds; and even Isis herself, who was able to find the atoms of Osiris, would scarce be able to recompose your being.

"See how vigorous I yet remain, and how mighty is my grasp," he added, shaking my hand in the English fashion with a strength that buried my rings in the flesh of my fingers.

He squeezed me so hard that I awoke, and found my friend Alfred shaking me by the arm to make me get up.

"O you everlasting sleeper!—must I have you carried out into the middle of the street, and fireworks exploded in your ears? It is after noon; don't you recollect your promise to take me with you to see M. Aguado's Spanish pictures?"

"God! I forgot all, all about it," I answered, dressing myself hurriedly; "we will go there at once; I have the permit lying on my desk."

I started to find it;—but fancy my astonishment when I beheld, instead of the mummy's foot I had purchased the evening before, the little green paste idol left in its place by the Princess Hermonthis!

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

The Unprincipled Affair of the Practical Joker

THE UNPRINCIPLED AFFAIR OF THE PRACTICAL JOKER

THE *Zambesi*, they said, was expected to dock at six in the morning; Mrs. Ruyslaender booked a bedroom at the Magnifical with despair in her heart. A bare nine hours and she would be greeting her husband. After that would begin the sickening period of waiting—it might be days, it might be weeks, possibly even months—for the inevitable discovery.

The reception-clerk twirled the register towards her. Mechanically, as she signed it, she glanced at the preceding entry:

“Lord Peter Wimsey and valet—London—Suite 24.”

Mrs Ruyslaender’s heart seemed to stop for a second. Was it possible that, even now, God had left a loophole? She expected little from Him—all her life He had shown Himself a sufficiently stern creditor. It was fantastic to base the frailest hope on this signature of a man she had never even seen.

Yet the name remained in her mind while she dined in her own room. She dismissed her maid presently, and sat for a long time looking at her own haggard reflection in the mirror. Twice she rose and went to the door—then turned back, calling herself a fool. The third time she turned the handle quickly and hurried down the corridor, without giving herself time to think.

A large golden arrow at the corner directed her to Suite 24. It was 11 o’clock, and nobody was within view. Mrs. Ruyslaender gave a sharp knock on Lord Peter Wimsey’s door, and stood back, waiting, with a sort of desperate relief one experiences after hearing a dangerous letter thump the bottom of the pillar-box. Whatever the adventure, she was committed to it.

The man-servant was of the imperturbable sort. He neither invited nor rejected, but stood respectfully upon the threshold.

"Lord Peter Wimsey?" murmured Mrs. Ruyslaender.

"Yes, madam."

"Could I speak to him for a moment?"

"His lordship has just retired, madam. If you will step in I will inquire."

Mrs. Ruyslaender followed him into one of those palatial sitting-rooms which the Magnifical provides for the wealthy pilgrim.

"Will you take a seat, madam?"

The man stepped noiselessly to the bedroom door and passed in, shutting it behind him. The lock however, failed to catch, and Mrs. Ruyslaender caught the conversation.

"Pardon me, my lord, a lady has called. She mentioned no appointment, so I considered it better to acquaint your lordship."

"Excellent discretion," said a voice. It had a slow, sarcastic intonation which brought a painful flush to Mrs. Ruyslaender's cheek. "I never make appointments. Do I know the lady?"

"No, my lord. But—hem—I know her by sight, my lord. It is Mrs. Ruyslaender."

"Oh, the diamond merchant's wife. Well, find out tactfully what it's all about, and, unless it's urgent, ask her to call to-morrow."

The valet's next remark was inaudible, but the reply was:

"Don't be coarse, Bunter."

The valet returned.

"His lordship desires me to ask you, madam, in what way he can be of service to you?"

"Will you say to him that I have heard of him in connection with the Attenbury diamond case, and am anxious to ask his advice."

"Certainly, madam. May I suggest that, as his lordship is greatly fatigued, he would be better able to assist you after he has slept?"

"If to-morrow would have done, I would not have thought of disturbing him to-night. Tell him I am aware of the trouble I am giving——"

"Excuse me one moment, madam."

This time the door shut properly. After a short interval Bunter returned to say, "His lordship will be with you immediately, madam," and to place a decanter of wine and a box of cigarettes beside her.

Mrs. Ruyslaender lit a cigarette, but had barely sampled its flavour when she was aware of a soft step beside her. Looking round, she perceived a young man attired in a mauve dressing-gown of great splendour, from beneath the hem of which peeped coyly a pair of primrose silk pyjamas.

"You must think it very strange of me, thrusting myself on you at this hour," she said, with a nervous laugh.

Lord Peter put his head on one side.

"Don't know the answer to that," he said. "If I say 'Not at all,' it sounds abandoned. If I say 'Yes, very,' it's rude. Supposin' we give it a miss, what—and you tell me what I can do for you?"

Mrs. Ruyslaender hesitated. Lord Peter was not what she had expected. She noted the sleek, straw-coloured hair, brushed flat back from a rather sloping forehead, the ugly, lean, arched nose, and the faintly foolish smile, and her heart sank within her.

"I—I'm afraid it's ridiculous of me to suppose you can help me," she began.

"Always my unfortunate appearance," moaned Lord Peter, with such alarming acumen as to double her discomfort. "Would it invite confidence more, d'you suppose, if I dyed my hair black, an' grew a Newgate fringe? It's very tryin', you can't think, always to look as if one's name was Algy."

"I only meant," said Mrs. Ruyslaender, "that I don't think anybody could possibly help. But I saw your name in the hotel book, and it seemed just a chance."

Lord Peter filled the glasses and sat down.

"Carry on," he said cheerfully; "it sounds interestin'."

Mrs. Ruyslaender took the plunge.

"My husband," she explained, "is Henry Ruyslaender, the diamond merchant. We came over from Kimberley ten years ago and settled in England. He spends several months in Africa every year on business, and I am expecting him back on the *Zambesi* to-morrow morning. Now, this is the trouble. Last year he gave me a magnificent diamond necklace of a hundred and fifteen stones——"

"The Light of Africa—I know," said Wimsley.

She looked a little surprised, but assented. "The necklace has been stolen from me and I can't hope to conceal the loss from him. No duplicate would deceive him for an instant."

She paused, and Lord Peter prompted gently :

"You have come to me, I presume, because it is not to be a police matter. Will you tell me quite frankly why?"

"The police would be useless. I know who took it."

"Yes?"

"There is a man we both know slightly—a man called Paul Melville."

Lord Peter's eyes narrowed. "M'm, yes, I fancy I've seen him about the clubs. New army, but transferred himself into the regulars. Dark. Showy. Bit of an ampelopsis, what?"

"Ampelopsis?"

"Suburban plant that climbs by suction. You know—first year, tender little shoots—second year, fine show—next year, all over the shop. Now tell me I am rude."

Mrs. Ruyslaender giggled. "Now you mention it, he is exactly like an ampelopsis. What a relief to be able to think of him as that . . . Well, he is some sort of distant relation of my husband's. He called one evening when I was alone. We talked about jewels, and I brought down my jewel-box and showed him the Light of Africa. He knows a good deal about stones. I was in and out of the room two or three times, but didn't think to lock up the box. After he left I was putting the things away, and I opened the jeweller's case the diamonds were in—and they had gone!"

"H'm—pretty barefaced. Look here, Mrs. Ruyslaender, you agree he's an ampelopsis, but you won't call in the police. Honestly, now—forgive me; you're askin' my advice, you know—is he worth botherin' about?"

"It's not that," said the woman, in a low tone. "Oh, no! But he took something else as well. He took—a portrait—a small painting set with diamonds."

"Oh!"

"Yes. It was in a secret drawer in the jewel-box. I can't imagine how he knew it was there, but the box was an old casket, belonging to my husband's family, and I fancy he must have known about the drawer and—well, thought that investigation might prove profitable. Anyway, the evening the diamonds went the portrait went too, and he knows I daren't try to get the necklace back because they'd both be found together."

"Was there something more than just the portrait, then?"

A portrait in itself isn't necessarily hopeless of explanation. It was given to you to take care of, say."

"The names were on it—and—and an inscription which nothing, nothing could ever explain away. A—a passage from Petronius."

"Oh, dear!" said Lord Peter, "dear me, yes. Rather a lively author."

"I was married very young," said Mrs. Ruyslaender, "and my husband and I have never got on well. Then one year, when he was in Africa, it all happened. We were wonderful—and shameless. It came to an end. I was bitter. I wish I had not been. He left me, you see, and I couldn't forgive it. I prayed day and night for revenge. Only now—I don't want it to be through me!"

"Wait a moment," said Wimsey, "you mean that, if the diamonds are found and the portrait is found too, all this story is bound to come out?"

"My husband would get a divorce. He would never forgive me—or him. It is not so much that I mind paying the price myself, but——"

She clenched her hands.

"I have cursed him again and again, and the clever girl who married him. She played her cards so well. This would ruin them both."

"But if you were the instrument of vengeance," said Wimsey gently, "you would hate yourself. And it would be terrible to you because he would hate you. A woman like you couldn't stoop to get your own back. I see that. If God makes a thunderbolt, how awful and satisfying—if you help to make a beastly row, what a rotten business it would be."

"You seem to understand," said Mrs. Ruyslaender. "How unusual."

"I understand perfectly. Though let me tell you," said Wimsey, with a wry little twist of the lips, "that it's sheer foolishness for a woman to have a sense of honour in such matters. It only gives her excruciating pain, and nobody expects it, anyway. Look here, don't let's get all worked up. You certainly shan't have your vengeance thrust on you by an ampelopsis. Why should you? Nasty fellow. We'll have him up—root, branch and little suckers. Don't worry. Let's see. My business here will only take a day. Then I've got to get to know Melville—say a week. Then I've got to

get the doings—say another week, provided he hasn't sold them yet, which isn't likely. Can you hold your husband off 'em for a fortnight, d'you think?"

"Oh, yes, I'll say they're in the country, or being cleaned, or something. But do you really think you can——?"

"I'll have a jolly good try, anyhow, Mrs. Ruyslaender. Is the fellow hard up, to start stealing diamonds?"

"I fancy he has got into debt over horses lately. And possibly poker."

"Oh! Poker player, is he? That makes an excellent excuse for gettin' to know him. Well, cheer up—we'll get the goods, even if we have to buy 'em. But we won't, if we can help it, Bunter!"

"My lord?" The valet appeared from the inner room.

"Just go an' give the 'All Clear,' will you?"

Mr. Bunter accordingly stepped into the passage and, having seen an old gentleman safely away to the bathroom and a young lady in a pink kimono pop her head out of an adjacent door and hurriedly pop it back on beholding him, blew his nose with a loud, trumpeting sound.

"Good night," said Mrs. Ruyslaender, "and thank you."

She slipped back to her room unobserved.

"Whatever has induced you, my dear boy," said Colonel Marchbanks, "to take up with that very objectionable fellow Melville?"

"Diamonds," said Lord Peter. "Do you find him so, really?"

"Perfectly dreadful man," said the Hon. Frederick Arbutnot. "Hearts. What did you want to go and get him a room here for? This used to be a quite decent club."

"Two clubs?" said Sir Impey Biggs, who had been ordering a whisky, and had caught only the last word.

"No, no, one heart."

"I beg your pardon. Well, partner, how about spades? Perfectly good suit."

"Pass," said the colonel. "I don't know what the army's coming to nowadays."

"No trumps," said Wimsey. "It's all right, children. Trust your Uncle Pete. Come on, Freddy, how many of those hearts are you going to shout for?"

"None, the colonel havin' let me down so 'orrid," said the Hon. Freddy.

"Cautious blighter. All content? Righty-ho! Bring out your dead, partner. Oh, very pretty indeed. We'll make it a slam this time. I'm rather glad to hear that expression of opinion from you, colonel, because I particularly want you and Biggy to hang on this evening and take a hand with Melville and me."

"What happens to me?" inquired the Hon. Freddy.

"You have an engagement and go home early, dear old thing. I've specially invited friend Melville to meet the redoubtable Colonel Marchbanks and our greatest criminal lawyer. Which hand am I supposed to be playin' this from? Oh yes. Come on, colonel—you've got to hike that old king out some time, why not now?"

"It's a plot," said Mr. Arbuthnot, with an exaggerated expression of mystery. "Carry on, don't mind me."

"I take it you have your own reasons for cultivating the man," said Sir Impey.

"The rest are mine, I fancy. Well, yes, I have. You and the colonel would really do me a favour by letting Melville cut in to-night."

"If you wish it," growled the colonel, "but I hope the impudent young beggar won't presume on the acquaintance."

"I'll see to that," said his lordship. "Your cards, Freddy. Who had the ace of hearts? Oh! I had it myself, of course. Our honours . . . Hullo! Evenin', Melville."

The ampelopsis was rather a good-looking creature in his own way. Tall and bronzed, with a fine row of very persuasive teeth. He greeted Wimsey and Arbuthnot heartily, the colonel with a shade too much familiarity, and expressed himself delighted to be introduced to Sir Impey Biggs.

"You're just in time to hold Freddy's hand," said Wimsey; "he's got a date. Not his little paddy-paw, I don't mean—but the dam' rotten hand he geneially gets dealt him. Joke."

"Oh, well," said the obedient Freddy, rising, "I s'pose I'd better make a noise like a hoop and roll away. Night-night, everybody."

Melville took his place, and the game continued with varying fortunes for two hours, at the end of which time Colonel Marchbanks, who had suffered much under his

partner's eloquent theory of the game, was beginning to wilt visibly.

Wimsey yawned.

"Gettin' a bit bored, colonel? Wish they'd invent some-
thin' to liven this game up a bit."

"Oh, bridge is a one-horse show, anyway," said Melville.

"Why not have a little flutter at poker, colonel? Do you
all the good in the world. What d'you say, Biggs?"

Sir Impey turned on Wimsey a thoughtful eye, accustomed
to the sizing-up of witnesses. Then he replied:

"I'm quite willing, if the others are."

"Damn good idea," said Lord Peter. "Come now, colonel,
be a sport. You'll find the chips in that drawer, I think.
I always lose money at poker, but what's the odds so long
as you're happy. Let's have a new pack."

"Any limit?"

"What do you say, colonel?"

The colonel proposed a twenty-shilling limit. Melville,
with a grimace, amended this to one-tenth of the pool.
The amendment was carried and the cards cut; the deal
falling to the colonel.

Contrary to his own prophecy, Wimsey began by winning
considerably, and grew so garrulously imbecile in the process
that even the experienced Melville began to wonder whether
this indescribable fatuity was the cloak of ignorance or the
mask of the hardened poker-player. Soon, however, he was
reassured. The luck came over to his side, and he found
himself winning hands down, steadily from Sir Impey and
the colonel, who played cautiously and took little risk—
heavily from Wimsey, who appeared reckless and slightly
drunk, and was staking foolishly on quite impossible cards.

"I never knew such luck as yours, Melville," said Sir
Impey, when that young man had scooped in the proceeds
from a handsome straight-flush.

"My turn to-night, yours to-morrow," said Melville,
pushing the cards across to Biggs, whose deal it was.

Colonel Marchbanks required one card. Wimsey laughed
vacantly and demanded an entirely fresh hand; Biggs asked
for three; and Melville, after a pause for consideration,
took one.

It seemed as though everybody had something respectable
this time, though Wimsey was not to be depended upon,

frequently going the limit upon a pair of jacks in order, as he expressed it, to keep the pot a-boiling. He became peculiarly obstinate now, throwing his chips in with a flushed face, in spite of Melville's confident air.

The colonel got out and, after a short time, Biggs followed his example. Melville held on till the pool mounted to something under a hundred pounds, when Wimsey suddenly turned restive and demanded to see him.

"Four kings," said Melville.

"Blast you!" said Lord Peter, laying down four queens. "No holdin' this feller to-night, is there? Here, take the ruddy cards, Melville, and give somebody else a look in, will you?"

He shuffled them as he spoke and handed them over. Melville dealt, satisfied the demands of the other three players, and was in the act of taking three new cards for himself, when Wimsey gave a sudden exclamation and shot a swift hand across the table.

"Hullo, Melville!" he said, in a chill tone which bore no resemblance to his ordinary speech. "What exactly does this mean?"

He lifted Melville's arm clear of the table and, with a sharp gesture, shook it. From the sleeve something fluttered to the table and glided away to the floor. Colonel Marchbanks picked it up and in a dreadful silence laid the joker on the table.

"Good God!" said Sir Impey.

"You young blackguard!" gasped the colonel, recovering his speech.

"What the hell do you mean by this?" gasped Melville, with a face like chalk. "How dare you! This is a trick—a plant——" A horrible fury gripped him. "You dare to say that I have been cheating. You liar! You filthy sharper. You put it there. I tell you, gentlemen," he cried, looking desperately round the table, "he must have put it there."

"Come, come," said Colonel Marchbanks, "no good carryin' on that way, Melville. Dear me, no good at all. Only makes matters worse. We all saw it, you know. Dear, dear, I don't know what the Army's coming to."

"Do you mean you believe it?" shrieked Melville. "For God's sake, Wimsey, is this a joke or what? Biggs—you've

got a head on your shoulders—are you going to believe this half-drunk fool and this doddering old idiot who ought to be in his grave?”

“That language won’t do any good, Melville,” said Sir Impey. “I’m afraid we all saw it clearly enough.”

“I’ve been suspectin’ this some time, y’know,” said Wimsey. “That’s why I asked you two to stay to-night. We don’t want to make a public row, but——”

“Gentlemen,” said Melville, more soberly, “I swear to you that I am absolutely innocent of this ghastly thing. Can’t you believe me?”

“I can believe the evidence of my own eyes, sir,” said the colonel, with some heat.

“For the good of the club,” said Wimsey, “this couldn’t go on, but—also for the good of the club—I think we should all prefer the matter to be quietly arranged. In the face of what Sir Impey and the colonel can witness, Melville, I’m afraid your protestations are not likely to be credited.”

Melville looked from the soldier’s face to that of the great criminal lawyer.

“I don’t know what your game is,” he said sullenly to Wimsey, “but I can see you’ve laid a trap and pulled it off all right.”

“I think, gentlemen,” said Wimsey, “that, if I might have a word in private with Melville in his own room, I could get the thing settled satisfactorily, without undue fuss.”

“He’ll have to resign his commission,” growled the colonel.

“I’ll put it to him in that light,” said Peter. “May we go to your room for a minute, Melville?”

With a lowering brow the young soldier led the way. Once alone with Wimsey he turned furiously on him.

“What do you want? What do you mean by making this monstrous charge? I’ll take action for libel!”

“Do,” said Wimsey coolly, “if you think anybody is likely to believe your story.”

He lit a cigarette and smiled lazily at the angry young man.

“Well, what’s the meaning of it, anyway?”

“The meaning,” said Wimsey, “is simply that you, an officer and a member of this club, have been caught red-handed cheating at cards while playing for money, the witnesses being Sir Impey Biggs, Colonel Marchbanks and myself.

Now, I suggest to you, Captain Melville, that your best plan is to let me take charge of Mrs. Ruyslaender's diamond necklace and portrait, and then just to trickle away quiet-like from these halls of dazzlin' light—without any questions asked."

Melville leapt to his feet.

"My God!" he cried. "I can see it now. It's blackmail."

"You may certainly call it blackmail, and theft, too," said Lord Peter, with a shrug. "But why use ugly names? I hold five aces, you see. Better chuck in your hand."

"Suppose I say I never heard of the diamonds?"

"It's a bit late now, isn't it?" said Wimsey affably. "But, in that case, I'm beastly sorry and all that, of course, but we shall have to make to-night's business public."

"Damn you!" muttered Melville. "You sneering devil."

He showed all his white teeth, half springing with crouched shoulders. Wimsey waited quietly, his hands in his pockets.

The rush did not come. With a furious gesture Melville pulled out his keys and unlocked his dressing-case.

"Take them," he growled, flinging a small parcel on the table; "you've got me. Take 'em and go to hell!"

"Eventually—why not now?" murmured his lordship.

"Thanks frightfully. Man of peace myself, you know. Hate unpleasantness and all that." He scrutinised his booty carefully, running the stones expertly between his fingers. Over the portrait he pursed up his lips. "Yes," he murmured, "that would have made a row." He replaced the wrapping and slipped the parcel into his pocket.

"Well, good-night, Melville, and thanks for a pleasant game."

"I say, Biggs," said Wimsey, when he had returned to the card-room. "You've had a lot of experience. What tactics d'you think one's justified in usin' with a blackmailer?"

"Ah!" said the K.C. "There you've put your finger on Society's sore place, where the Law is helpless. Speaking as a man, I'd say nothing could be too bad for the brute. It's a crime crueller and infinitely worse in its results than murder. As a lawyer I can only say that I have consistently refused to defend a blackmailer or to prosecute any poor devil who does away with his tormentor."

"H'm," replied Wimsey. "What do you say, colonel?"

"A man like that's a filthy pest," said the little warrior stoutly. "Shootin's too good for him. I knew a man—close personal friend, in fact—hounded to death—blew his brains out—one of the best. Don't like to talk about it."

"I want to show you something," said Wimsey.

He picked up the pack which still lay scattered on the table and shuffled it together.

"Catch hold of these, colonel, and lay 'em out face downwards. That's right. First of all you cut 'em at the twentieth card—you'll see the seven of diamonds at the bottom. Correct? Now I'll call 'em. Ten of hearts, ace of spades, three of clubs, five of clubs, king of diamonds, nine, jack, two of hearts. Right? I could pick 'em all out, you see, except the ace of hearts, and that's here."

He leaned forward and produced it dexterously from Sir Impey's breast-pocket.

"I learnt it from a man who shared my dug-out near Ypres," he said. "You needn't mention to-night's business, you two. There are crimes which the Law cannot reach."

F. A. KUMMER

The de Medici Cup

THE DE MEDICI CUP

I

HUGO NIKOLAI had decided to steal the de Medici cup. It had become necessary to his dreams.

He did not, it is true, think of the act as theft. So sordid a performance, with its underlying motive of gain expressed in dollars and cents, would have been inexpressibly repugnant to him, poverty-stricken though he was. His desire for the cup, rare masterpiece of that no less rare sixteenth century craftsman, Messer Benvenuto Cellini, arose from a different source: he was hungry for beauty.

To appropriate a beautiful thing in order to worship it was not, he argued, theft in any ordinary sense of the word. One might desire, might even by force possess a beautiful woman through love of her and still not be held a thief. And, to him, the great golden chalice blazed with a beauty no mere woman could ever hope to obtain.

Dream of a master craftsman wrought in gold and enamel, the exquisite artistry of its modelling, its perfection of form and line, held spellbound before the small glass case in the museum which formed its shrine those more discriminating lovers of the beautiful to whom the work of the great Florentine was not a sealed book. If their number was small among the throngs which daily visited the building, it but emphasised the fact that royal mummy cases, vivid pictures, large statues in the nude hold a surer appeal for the crowd.

Even on that first day, when April rain like silver sheaves of wheat had driven Hugo from his Sunday afternoon walk in the park to seek shelter in the museum's vast interior, he had felt its appeal; had stood so long before its solitary cabinet that one of the guards, viewing his threadbare suit, his hungry eyes, with disfavour, had bade him move on. How could a mere guard know that Hugo, in his youth, had

lived in an atmosphere of beautiful things, had been taught to reverence them, had even once been taken by his father all the way from their home in Lemberg to Vienna, just to gaze upon the silver salt-cellar of Francis First in the museum there—superb example of Cellini's work? But that was before the tides of war had swept over his father's house, to toss Hugo, like a bit of wreckage, halfway round the world and leave him stranded in New York, dully playing the 'cello in a dingy East Side café. In that situation a love of beauty, an appreciation of the work of such masters as Benvenuto Cellini, was of as little value to him as would have been a knowledge of relativity, yet he clung to his dreams the more fiercely, because, like a fierce hunger, they were denied.

It was inevitable that he should come to the museum again and again, after that first quite accidental visit, to stand in reverence before the exquisite c. p. His love for it became an obsession; he worshipped it as men might have worshipped a mistress. It seemed to hold within its lovely arms all the beauty his starved soul had craved. Often, at night, he would sit in his small, poor room for hours, staring in silence at a vase which stood upon his dresser—a cracked china vase of uncertain purpose and origin, yellowed by age. Under his rapt gaze it would be transformed quite magically into the golden chalice—would stand there before him in all the latter's rare and exquisite perfection. Its slender arms, formed of two nude and pliant female figures, entranced him; the design upon its bowl—the Judgment of Paris—caused his heart to throb almost painfully in his eager desire for possession. Between a dream and a reality there is often but a step. Having on numberless occasions pictured the china vase as the real one, Hugo decided quite suddenly one night to steal the de Medici cup.

His plans were simple, and therein lay their strength. In the gallery in which the chalice stood he had found a place where he might hide, while the guards, at closing time, were hurrying the stragglers from the building. Left thus alone, sixty seconds would suffice him to crush in the top of the cabinet with a billet of lead held in his glove, to drop the cup into a bag sewed inside his overcoat. A sheet of fly-paper, swiftly applied to the top of the case, would obviate any danger of noise from the falling glass. He would then

be free to stroll from the building unsuspected before the front doors were closed. After that, he had but to disappear and the chalice was his, to worship for the rest of his life—to gloat over, in secret, as a miser gloats over his gold. The world which had robbed him of beauty should give it back to him again in the shape of this priceless cup. Not theft, but reparation, he muttered, as he lay on his shabby bed. There should be no miscalculation, no error. His plans for escape had been carefully made. Within a month he would be in Paris.

.II

Most men are slaves to their passions. Their love for liquor, for cards, for wealth, for power, for fame—even, as in Hugo's case, for beauty—may variously dominate them. But the love of women—of a woman—is the master passion, and while it lasts all others must stand aside. A trite observation, perhaps, yet one the lesson of which Hugo had still to learn.

He had left New York as cook's helper on a sooty tramp bound for Marseilles, and so well had his plans been arranged that he disappeared as completely from his tiny groove as a pebble dropped into the Atlantic. Now, for six months he had been in Paris, a waiter in a fourth-rate restaurant. His life was as grey as the paving-stones of the small street near the Place de la Bastille in which he lived, but when he drew the gleaming chalice from its hiding place behind the rafters of his garret it warmed him, as other men are warmed by the sun.

It was Elsa Makart who came to change all that—Elsa, with hair as brightly golden as the gold of the chalice itself, and a body more rare and exquisite than anything Cellini had ever fashioned, soft and warm and beautiful, made for love. Grown tired of her ancient profession, sick of the commercialised love-making of tipsy shopkeepers and clerks, her keen eyes discerned beneath Hugo Nikolai's shabby exterior the figure of a man.

There must have been good blood in her as well, a certain fineness of texture, since in the same way that he attracted her she attracted him. A new and fragrant mystery he found her, which all his throbbing senses demanded should be solved.

At the expiration of a week she came to his garret to live, like any other dutiful and affectionate wife, although without benefit of clergy.

As the days passed Hugo realised, as though he had made some tremendous discovery, that beauty may live in the form of a woman as well as in a great work of art. When the first month was over, the masterpiece of Cellini, dust-covered in its hiding-place, was still an exquisite example of sixteenth century goldsmith's work, but it was the figure of Elsa that now stood as goddess of beauty in Hugo's shrine.

One night he drew the chalice from behind the rafters and showed it to her. Elsa was not greatly impressed. A golden cup was a golden cup, in her eyes—a thing to be possessed by the wealthy. She would much have preferred the wine it might have contained. When Hugo remarked upon its value, its rarity, she advised him to sell it. The wages of sin may be death, but it was life of which Elsa dreamed. Paris up to now had been the limits of her horizon. The North Sea drizzle gave her coughing spells; she longed for the Riviera—for Spain. Decidedly, if Hugo loved her he would sell the stupid thing and take her on a pleasure trip to Monte Carlo.

"It is of no use to us at all, my little cabbage," she whispered, her arms laid softly about his neck. "And my health is of great use, if I am to look after you, stupid. Sell it at once."

A man of Hugo Nikolai's temperament worships but one image—at a time. In worshipping Elsa he felt that he was still true to beauty. Offerings must be laid at her feet—worthy offerings, not to be procured with the scanty earnings at his command. By cautious inquiry he discovered the name of a dealer, a very rich dealer, a Jew, who, it was reported, would buy anything from a rope of pearls to a royal crown and no questions asked, provided he could do so without undue risk, and at his own price.

To this man's place Hugo came one night, the chalice wrapped in a bit of brown paper. He hoped to obtain at least a quarter of a million francs for it, which was far below its real worth. With such a sum in hand, he and Elsa could live happily for the remainder of their days in some golden spot beside the Mediterranean, undisturbed by such disagreeable aspects of life as were presented by waiting on tables in fourth-rate restaurants. It was a pleasant dream.

The little Jew sat behind a desk, his face, his entire skull seemingly encased in a tightly-drawn covering of parchment. Through the heavy-rimmed glasses which drooped from his nose he observed Hugo narrowly.

"I have an object of great value which I desire to sell," the latter muttered, glancing at his package.

The Jew said nothing. His thoughts were that the young man before him, while poorly dressed, spoke in the tongue of the cultured, and therefore in all probability knew the value of what he wished to sell. This was unfortunate. From common, from ignorant men, it was often possible to acquire pearls of great price for a song.

Hugo stripped the wrappings from the chalice, set it on the desk beneath the dealer's nose. In the light of the shaded globe which hung from the ceiling it stood magnificent, superb.

The older man gave a long, silent look, his face expressionless. Then he drew back with a faint gasp between admiration and fear.

"You—you wish to sell—this?" he demanded.

"Yes," Hugo replied steadily. "For three hundred thousand francs." He thought that by asking the larger sum he would the more surely obtain the smaller.

"Gott in Himmel!" In his excitement the old man reverted to the more virile tongue of his youth. "To sell this! The masterpiece of Cellini? The de Medici cup? Are you mad?"

"I—I do not understand you," Hugo stammered, "I know it is—priceless. Three hundred thousand francs is nothing at all——"

The dealer stopped him with a look.

"You cannot sell it! At any price. It is, as you say, priceless! No one in the world would dare buy it from you!"

"But—why not? You could sell it again—to some millionaire—for twice, three times what I ask——"

"A hundred times!" the little Jew burst out, "if it were but a question of money. But it is more—far more. Do you not know that when a work of art, such as this, comes into the hands of a great museum, it has reached its last resting place—its tomb? You have robbed a grave, young man! I do not deal in—corpses! Take it away!"

Even to have it beneath my roof so long is dangerous! The police of the world are searching for it! Take it away!" In the excitement of the moment his voice cracked to a shrill falsetto, and Hugo, amazed, took up the chalice and hastened out.

There was but one explanation he could make to Elsa—that he had been mistaken in the value of the piece. When he told her this she laughed.

"I knew you were a fool, to rate it so highly," she said. "People don't waste money on silly ornaments nowadays. For the parlour. For themselves—yes. Jewels. But no one could wear a thing like this. Not even as a hat." Playfully she tried to force the cup upon her no less golden head. "But do not despair, my old one. The thing is gold, is it not? I know a man, not far from here, who will buy it—melt it up." She hefted the cup in one tiny hand. "Of great weight, *mon ami*. It should bring three or four thousand francs, as old metal."

"Elsa!" Hugo tried to take the cup from her, but she eluded him. "What you say is impossible! Its beauty would be destroyed!"

"So? What of it? You still have me. And if I do not soon get out of this cursed Paris and its rains my beauty will be destroyed, which is of much more importance."

Hugo, an expression of bewilderment upon his features, shook his head.

"Is it possible you do not understand?" he muttered, and stared at her as one who had suddenly become alien, strange. "I cannot destroy beauty——"

Elsa set the chalice on the table and flung herself into his arms, striving by every lure she knew to break down his resolution, force him to her wishes. With hot and seeking lips she tempted him, with ceaseless caresses, with sighs. And against her fought the loveliness that the imagination of a master had created. A singular struggle. Beauty against beauty. The chalice wrought by a genius against the chalice wrought by God! The spirit against the living flesh. Hugo, weak from the girl's impassionate kisses, trembling beneath the fear that he might lose her, still clung to beauty, revered it, as his father had taught him to reverence it, and refused to do as she asked.

"It is not for myself, Elsa," he muttered, "that I deny

you. I would gladly give you my soul!" She was the first woman in all the world to bring love to him, or what she had made him think was love. "But this priceless thing belongs, not to me, but to the world. The world of beauty, of art, about which you know nothing. I would sell it—gladly—but I cannot destroy it—not even for love!"

"You do not know what love is!" She sprang from his knees, flung herself away scornfully. "To prize that silly thing above me!"

"You would melt it in the fire of your passion!" he retorted, her sneer lashing him to anger.

"Why not? Think, beloved." Again she fondled him, then once more snatched the chalice from the table. "It is very heavy. Perhaps the goldsmith will give us ten thousand francs! With that we can go to Monte Carlo! I am lucky—always lucky! We will play, starting with a small stake! In a week, we shall have a fortune! Think of it, Hugo! The whole world before us!" She drooped toward him, tempting, sensuous. "I will love you—please you—live for you always! What is this thing, to keep us from our happiness? A stupid bit of carving—no more! Even its naked women are not as beautiful as I! Would you prefer women of gold, to me? Can they warm you—please you, as I can? And it is not for the money alone that I would destroy this thing! Its mere presence is a danger to you! Some day the police——" She paused, holding the golden chalice high above her head. "It is for your safety, Hugo—my love!" Her arms swung as she sought to beat the cup into a shapeless mass against the whitewashed stones.

But Hugo stopped her. All his love, his reverence for this fragment of an artist's soul was expressed in swift movement. Before Elsa's arm halfway reached the wall, he had torn the chalice from her fingers, stepped back, clutching it to his breast.

The girl stood staring at him; in her eyes blazed fury, hatred, contempt.

"Imbecile!" she screamed. "Insensate! Keep your stupid cup, if you love it so! Sleep with it—for you will not sleep with me!" In a rage she pulled on her hat, sprang towards the door. "If you want me back, do as I ask! Crush it, beat it before my eyes into a lump of gold!" Jealousy flamed in her—jealousy, not of another woman,

but of a principle. More than the loss of a few thousand francs stirred her anger now. To her primitive mind it was inconceivable that any man should throw aside her lovely body for the sake of a bit of carved metal. She fled down the stairs, certain that Hugo would come after her, ready to do as she wished.

He, shaking with emotion, sank on the edge of his bed, the chalice still clasped in his arms. The words of the little Jew came back to him, "You have robbed a grave!"

Against the mental emotions thus aroused beat elemental passions, surging like fire through his veins. Life had been cruel to him—bitterly cruel. This woman had been the first to bring him tenderness, to bind up his wounds. He wanted her, as he wanted life itself, but what life could there be for him if he denied its noblest instincts? To destroy love—that was bitter indeed. But to destroy beauty—that was unthinkable! All night he lay in torture, a prisoner on the rack of his emotions, but in spite of the agony which filled him he did not go in search of Elsa. When the grey fingers of dawn touched his sooty windows he had reached a decision. There was but one course to follow when one has robbed a grave. He would take the chalice back.

III

As Hugo came into the office the grey-bearded curator was sitting at a table, examining some fragments of pottery through a magnifying glass. He looked up, about his eyes an inquiring smile.

"Yes?" he said, taking in all of Hugo, even the newspaper-wrapped package, with his mild but penetrating gaze.

Hugo Nikolai trembled. Visions of prison cells, of years of entombment, confronted him. That there would be punishment awaiting him—dreadful punishment—he did not doubt. But what matter? The thing he had stolen must once more rest in its sepulchre, to be worshipped, admired by the world. What happened to him was of small importance. Slowly, almost stupidly, he removed the wrappings from his package, set the great chalice on the table.

The elderly curator reached out and touched it gently, his sensitive fingers trembling. What emotions swept through

him he did not betray except by that. His voice was quiet, calm.

"So you have brought it back?" he whispered. "I thought you would."

"Yes," Hugo stammered, shaking violently. "I—I had to. It belongs here. I should never have taken it away. I am sorry—very sorry." He told his story, his face ashen.

When he had finished, the curator again fixed him with that mild but penetrating stare.

"Since it returns in safety, we are satisfied," he said, his voice like a pleasant bell. "Is—is that all? I am rather busy——"

"You—do you mean?" Hugo gasped, "that—that you are not going to do anything to me?"

"Nothing. We have the chalice. And, of course, should we turn you over to the police the affair would get into the newspapers. The matter shall rest between us two. I am gratified, indeed, that you have brought back the cup, but suppose I should tell you that it is only a very excellent copy, made by a New York goldsmith, and that the original has never been out of our hands."

Hugo's senses reeled. He clutched the table for support. His face turned the colour of old canvas. He saw Elsa, magnificent in her passion, fighting to possess him—saw himself, casting her aside for the sake of a sham. But no. That was not the truth. It was beauty, for which he had fought—beauty, whether in the original or in the perfect copy! His head went up. Even the curator's words could not rob him of that!

"In any event," the curator went on, "you have reason to be proud. The impulse which caused you to return the cup to us was no less commendable, even though it may have been misapplied. The intent was the same." He put out his hand, smiling.

Hugo stood very straight with the curator's hand in his, feeling for a brief moment like a knight who has just received the accolade. Then, with unaccountable tears in his eyes he stumbled out to the early spring loveliness of the park. At the curator's desk a young man, hastily summoned, stood staring down at the great golden chalice.

"The de Medici cup!" he gasped, incredulous. "I never expected to see it again."

The curator regarded him with a whimsical smile.

"Do you know, Powell," he said, "I sometimes think we should have a copy made of it, for exhibition purposes, and keep the original in our vaults. It is a rare and beautiful thing, Powell—almost as rare and beautiful as the human soul."

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

High Tide



HIGH TIDE

I MISSED my steamer at Georgetown on Demerara River and shipped in a tramp for Trinidad, where there was a chance of overtaking the passenger boat. She had a start, but would be at Port of Spain for forty-eight hours. Thus it came about I fell in with old Skipper Benny Blake, and spent some invigorating hours in his company. He had followed the sea for fifty-five years and enjoyed various experiences; but there is one little narrative I always remember with entertainment.

It brings back Benny's grizzled face and his cocked eye under its white eyebrow, his sing-song voice, and his healthy enjoyment of the tale. And since the yarn went into my notebook straight from Benny's lips, his story of the high tide may still retain a little of the weather-bitten veteran, who told it on the bridge of his cargo boat while we plodded north through a rough blue sea. It followed another—of taking time by the forelock and seizing an unexpected opportunity—and my comment reminded Captain Blake of his earlier adventure.

" 'There is a tide in the affairs of men,' " I quoted, and he admitted it literally.

"There may be sure enough. I remember one such tide mighty well, and, taken at the flood, it led not to fortune exactly, though it helped in that direction for me and my brother, Billy. 'Twas I took that tide, and when I tell about it, I can always see, out of the tail of my eye, that nobody believes—yet true as gospel is the yarn.

"Me and my brother was born in Georgetown, you must know, of a white father and an octoroon mother. There ain't much of the tar-brush in me, though Billy showed more of it. I went to the sea at ten years old, but he was a land bird and hadn't no use for a ship. We both got on very well and was out in the world before our parents died. By

that time, at five and twenty, I had a master's ticket and commanded a coasting ship as traded along the Guianas—British, Dutch and French; and Billy had drifted into French country and got a nice bit of cane-growing ground, inland from Sinnamarie. 'Twas a new settlement then, for this happened nearly half a century ago, though quite a busy little hole nowadays; but then the port weren't much more than a bit of a pier up in the river mouth and fifty ramshackle houses and stores dumped round it. Up country they was opening out pretty brisk, and Billy had got a lot of ground cleared and plenty of cane. He was saving money, and had a wife and four kiddies by the time he was six-and-twenty.

"We met now and again, for my tub, the *Firefly*, traded up and down, and he'd come to the port to see me sometimes, and now and again I'd go up country to him, twenty miles inland, and have a look at his place and his family. A little light railway, that started from the wharf-head, ran you up, and his land was but two miles from the terminus, so he got his cane down the country easy enough, for he didn't make sugar—he sent all his stuff to Cayenne for that.

"And there came a time when I found Billy terribly excited and above himself, for the chap on the next lot to his had dropped sudden of yellow fever, and his ground was to be sold at auction in six weeks from that date. 'Twas a very fine piece, twice as big and twice as fat as my brother's, and he was death on getting it if he had to mortgage the shirt on his back. Well, I believed in him, and knew no smarter man was earning his living in them parts, and I promised he should have my savings on top of his own if they'd help him to bid high enough. For I was a bachelor then, and ever remained so, along of no feeling for the married state and never having struck a female as seemed exactly a head and shoulders above the rest of her sex. And Billy was properly grateful, and reckoned that, if only the matter didn't get wind too far, he'd just about land the estate with what he could offer.

"So it stood, and I was glad to be making for Sinnamarie again at the time of the sale, and hoped to hear the good news that my brother had got the property. But that happened on the voyage down to fill me with fear, for a man went with me from Surinam in Dutch Guiana—a fat, noisy Hol-

lander—and long before I knew anything about his business I hated the chap, because he was vain and a boaster and wondered how anybody in his right mind could take to the sea for a living. He was my only passenger, and not until we ran into a calm ten miles from our port did I hear what brought him to Sinnamarie. Then he cursed the Firefly, as thought twas her fault the wind had given out, and explained he was due to a sale up country for a bit of land. He'd got wind of the estate next my brother's lot, and he meant to have it.

"'There'll only be some local mongrels and niggers up there,' he said, 'and it's going cheap as dirt no doubt. But I've got advice that the ground's worth a lot more than it will fetch, and a bargain's what I'm out for. Nobody knows I'm coming, so I shall just pop in and snatch up the ground for a song.'

"My heart stood still, and for once in my life I didn't whistle for wind. It came, however, and by morning we were on our way again. So I was up against it. If I landed this oily beast it was good-bye to the estate for Billy, and if I did not it was good-bye to my command for me. I couldn't make any bones about that, so I did my duty, of course, and in due time we fetched port, ran alongside the jetty and began to break out our cargo as usual.

"I had no power to let Billy know, for there weren't any telegraph nor nothing at that time. And though I might have gone up in the little one-hoss train with the enemy next morning, it wouldn't have helped us if I had. The sale would take place at 10 o'clock on the following day, you see, and the problem for me was how to keep this pig from Surinam out of our way till the job were through.

"Well, sharp though my wits used to be in them days, they weren't sharp enough to solve that riddle without a bit of help from nature. I figured it out against the Dutchman every way, because he was a stuck-up swine without any heart or manners, and I'd have been well pleased to best the beggar for no other reason than that I didn't like him. But far more than that hung to it, and when I thought of my brother there weren't no shadow in my mind against chousing the enemy if I could. But how?

"We came in after noon on the top of the tide, and ran our nose over the little quay as usual, and I mind when we

knocked off work for the night, and me and my mate—Nathan Sales he was, and went down in the *Star of Bethlehem* six years after—we sat for'ard smoking, and I told him my trouble, and that, so sure as our passenger went up country in the morning train, so sure my brother would be outbid for the precious land.

"He couldn't see no way out of it, and we were just going ashore to stretch our legs presently when the train came down from the interior and ran into the station shed at the harbour mouth. A little toy thing 'twas, and made up for the size with noise and stink of coconut oil; and behind it came the rolling stock—all there was on the blessed line in them days—two passenger cars and three goods trucks. We was looking at it when my Dutchman came along with his portmanteau.

"'I must sleep in the ship, Skipper,' he says. 'There's no place for a gentleman to put up here, and nothing for a gentleman to eat. So I'll have dinner and bed and breakfast aboard.'

"'You're welcome,' I answers, and he went in the ship. As for me and Sales, we poked about and found there was only one train up and one train down the line a day. She'd start next morning at nine o'clock in time to take the Dutchman up to the auction.

"We watched them heave round the engine on a turntable; then they raked out her fire and left her alongside the quay while night came down, and I remember very well eating my supper along with the Dutchman, and how afterwards he smoked a whacking cigar out of his case, and praised it, but didn't offer me one. He bragged and gassed till 'twas all I could do to keep from hitting him over the earhole, but I got a bit of satire in at last and told him that for bounce and brag I'd never seen his equal in the Guianas. Then he turned nasty at once and said that weren't the way for sailormen to treat passengers, and he'd write to the owners and take a bit of trouble that I heard of it again.

"'I'm somebody, and you're less than nobody,' he said, 'and no man insults me but gets the worst end of it in the long run. You've done for yourself now, you seafaring fool!'

"Then he went to his cabin aft and I saw no more of him.

"Sales was on deck and I spoke a strong thing to the man

when I joined him. A night of stars it was and a falling tide. The docks were deserted, and we seemed to be in a sort of black hole, with a rough edge of palm-trees showing where the land stopped and the sky began.

"'Nathan,' I said, 'I'd sell my soul to the dowl to be level with that hog.'

"'I know,' he answered. 'I wish I could help you; but, without violence, we could do nought, and violent we cannot be, because duty's duty all the time. If you'd kept friends you might have poured the whisky down his neck and got him so dead to the world that he wouldn't have woke in time to start to-morrow.'

"'He's not that sort,' I told Sales. 'He could drink me under the table—such a barrel as he's got—if he was minded to.'

"Then suddenly we heard a bit of a jolt for'ard, and, looking over, we see a curious thing. The tide was falling, and we was falling with it, and our bowsprit was coming down on the little engine drawn up on the railway line under our nose. 'Twas a bit of a surprise in a way, for I had never marked before there was such a proper drop in the tide at this place, and to find our bowsprit, as had been twenty feet above the quay down to ten or thereabout astonished me. There wan't a minute to lose, so Sales blew his whistle and our crew of five tumbled up quick from their cards in the fo'c'sle. Then we got ashore and with a pull all together cleared the engine out of the way.

"We thought no more of the incident, except to cuss the nigger fireman and stoker, and we was back again, and just going to turn in, when Providence at last came to the rescue. Like a stroke of lightning it flashed upon me, and I gave such a jump that I was nearly overboard.

"'I've got it!' I said to Sales.

"'So it seems,' he answered. 'What 'ave you got—St. Vitus's dance?'

"'No,' I told him. 'I've got the way to queer that blighter's pitch to-morrow. Call the hands and tell 'em to be as quiet as dead men. This'll be an extra rum ration and half-a-quid all round I shouldn't wonder.'

"Then I stepped into my deckhouse cabin and lit a lamp and looked up the tides. It only wanted that, and when I saw nature was going to be on our side, I went ahead and

gived about the strangest orders that ever a crew heard from their skipper's lips. Not an order neither, but a request ; for I got 'em together, told 'em how the land lay, and said they could do me a proper good turn if they so willed and a favour I shouldn't forget. But I pointed out there was a bit of danger and that what I was after couldn't be reconciled nohow with law and order. I said there was a bright side to that also, because, in the first place, if we all lied like one man, the port authorities could do nought, and in the second place, if assault and battery was proved against us, I'd take the blame on my own shoulders and stand the racket as it was my duty to do.

"They shied at assault and battery, however, being very good, sober men with never a black mark against one of 'em ; but I explained my meaning.

" 'We ain't going to assault a human,' I said ; 'and for that matter there's nobody but the night-watchman within half-a-mile of the wharf. But what I'm out for is the engine yonder. 'Tis like this here,' I said. 'Without that loco' the train can't go to-morrow morning, and if the train don't go then this Dutch swine snoring aft won't go neither ; and then my brother's all right for the land. Without the engine the game is up.'

"They wanted to know what I was going to do against the engine, and didn't seem easy in their minds till I explained.

" 'Bless your life, I wouldn't touch a hair of the engine's head,' I told 'em ; 'but this I'd do : I'd just make it a dead cert that the nine o'clock train don't start on the morn. Their engine shall be sound in wind and limb and ready and willing to set sail at half after ten or later, but not a minute sooner. We'll do a dashing deed,' I said, 'and we'll use the hawser from the quay—then who's going to say who 'twas ? In two hours,' I told the boys, 'the tide will turn, and in three hours we can run the engine under our bowsprit, where 'twas a bit ago. Then we can get a hitch round the beggar and make fast to our stick, and the tide's going to do the rest. The tide suits something beautiful. 'Tis full at seven-thirty o'clock in the morning, and at that hour the engine will be fifteen feet off the rails and taking the air up aloft. And she can't come down again till nearer ten than nine.'

"They laughed and was in it up to the neck right away. Only Sales had a fear we'd hurt the Firefly ; but I knew

she were all right and could have lifted the whole of their toy train on her nose if we wanted for to do so. But we ran a stay or two down from the foremast to help the bowsprit do the job ; and then, when the tide came, we worked like white men and got the engine in its place and, with a hawser from the harbour, took a good half-dozen turns under her belly and made her fast.

"The night-watchman was an old nigger known to me, and I went to see him so as there shouldn't be no trouble there ; but I found the ancient man sound asleep on a pile of coco-nut trash, so never had no difficulty with him. He woke just at dawn, and no doubt thought he'd lost the use of his wits when he doddered round and found the railway engine looking down at him from our bowsprit ; but 'twas eight feet above his head by then, and still soaring to heaven. And when he shouted out and woke the ship a more surprised and shocked man than Sales or an angrier man than me you couldn't picture. And meantime the sun rose, and the tide rose, and the Firefly rose, and the engine also rose till she was dangling very near twenty feet above the rails !

"Then the harbour-master came along—a Frenchman he was—and listened to me, and I told him that never since I went to sea had a more disgraceful thing been done to a ship, and I demanded that the culprits should be brought to justice, and swore if my schooner was damaged, or so much as a stay started, I'd have the law on his Government. I even threatened to cut the engine loose and let her rip to blazes ; but that the frightened man prayed me not to do.

"And when I'd lost my wind, then Sales got on the harbour-master. The man spoke English pretty well, and he swore from the first that nobody in Sinnamarie would have done such a thing for money, let alone any smaller inducement. And presently the fireman and his stoker came to get up steam, and found their blessed loco' floating like a bird in the morning sun ; and to see that brace of niggers was worth all the trouble in itself. And then my Dutchman turned out ; but he was only interested in his breakfast, and didn't know the jolt in store for his nerves till I came along to the top of the table and broke the bad news.

"He scowled at me, and no doubt expected me to be glum after our row the night before ; but, on the contrary, he found me amazing friendly, and terrible sorry for him

and very indignant that he should have had his little voyage for nothing.

"‘You haven’t heard the shocking news,’ I said, ‘but a bit of wicked mischief was hatched by some unknown blackguard boys last night, and the rascals hitched the railway engine to my bowsprit, and these here high tides have done the rest. An’ I’m a lot put about for you; but you’ll understand, of course, that your quarrel is with the shore people, not the ship.’

"‘What does this tomfoolery matter to me?’ he asked, and I had the pleasure of explaining.

"‘It matters ‘like this,’ I said. ‘There’s only one engine on their little road, and as that engine is playing at being a pelican for the minute, there won’t be no train up country in time for the auction. So you won’t be there, and in fact you’ve had your trip for nought but the pleasure of my company.’

"‘I hadn’t broke the news till it was well in for nine o’clock, and he rushed out then and stormed and cussed, and had everybody by the ears. But nobody gave a damn for him—least of all the engine. She was having the time of her life, and didn’t show no inclination to come down and get to work; and when the tide fell presently, and she returned to the rails, ‘twas nearly ten o’clock.

"‘At a bit after eleven she started, and I went in her to see how things had gone with my brother Billy. And the Dutchman went, too, in hope he might yet get the ground out of the purchaser with a bit of added money.

"‘But once more the luck was against the creature. Billy had grabbed the estate all right, for even less than he hoped, and wasn’t tempted to sell again, though my passenger offered good money. And when the fat fellow found it was a relation of mine had the land he tumbled to the game all right. He had to sail with me two days later, because there weren’t any other way home; but not a word he spoke till he was on the gangway going off.

"‘Then he told me what he thought of me, and I never heard a stronger expression of opinion nastier put.

"‘He wrote to my masters also; but it’s everybody for himself in the shipping trade, and as they reckoned I was more use to ‘em than the Dutchman could be, they just whispered a word of warning in my ears and left it at that.”

LADY ELEANOR SMITH

Mrs. Raeburn's Waxwork
Satan's Circus

MRS. RAEBURN'S WAXWORK

THE rain, which had poured with a pitiless ferocity for so long upon the chimneys and roofs of the great manufacturing city, seemed at length to enclose the whole town within towering prison-walls of burnished steel. It was now afternoon; the short winter day was nearly over, and it had rained thus from dawn, would probably continue to rain throughout the night. A dark, wet dusk began to envelop the city like a sable blanket; the street-lamps sprang into life, looming ahead like the ghosts of drowned and weary daffodils, casting watery and trembling reflections upon the shining rivers that were pavements. There were few people walking the mournful streets, and those that were had to struggle and batter their way through sharp gusts of wind, bent double beneath dripping and top-heavy umbrellas.

Such a one was Patrick Lamb, and so great was his hurry that more than once as he stumbled over an unperceived kerb he ran the risk of entangling both himself and his umbrella in the foaming, muddy torrents of the gutters beneath his feet. He had every reason to hurry; he was on his way to apply for a job, and he feared that unless he hastened he would be too late to secure this vacancy which meant so much to him.

Turning at last into a dark and narrow street, he saw opposite to him a ramshackle building of yellow brick, from the roof of which swelled forth a glass dome encrusted with the dirt and soot of ages. A flight of shallow steps led to a swing door. This was his destination.

He flung open the door and was immediately confronted by a turnstile, near which sat a seedy-looking man in an ill-fitting uniform not unlike that of a fireman.

"Sixpence, please," said the man, and whistled through his teeth.

Patrick Lamb shook his head.

"No. . . . I'm not a visitor. I have an appointment with Mr. Mugivan, the manager."

"Ah—ha," said the attendant knowingly, and showed him into a tiny slice of a room filled with papers, files, account-books and dust. Here sat Mr. Mugivan, a fat, podgy man with thick legs and a face like a tomato.

"Good afternoon," said Patrick Lamb hesitatingly, "I hear that you have a vacancy here for an—an attendant."

Mr. Mugivan stared for a moment at the young man's sallow, rather long face, at his deep-set grey eyes and slender, puny body.

"Who told you so?"

"My landlady, in Bury Street. She knew the last man you had here."

"And what made you come?"

"Necessity. I'm in need of work. I was stranded here a week ago with a theatrical company."

There was a silence. Mr. Mugivan suddenly laughed, looking at his visitor rather defiantly with little red-rimmed eyes that were not unlike the eyes of a pig.

"Rather a come-down, isn't it, for an actor to find himself minding Mugivan's Waxworks?"

"That doesn't matter—sir. And, if you'll only let me, I'll mind them damn well."

"It's long hours," said the proprietor, still speaking contemptuously. "Nine in the morning till seven at night. An hour for lunch and an hour for tea. Two pounds a week—and the attendant has to wear a uniform. *An actor* wouldn't fancy that, would he?"

"Maybe I'm not an actor," said Patrick Lamb.

Mr. Mugivan spat upon the floor.

"I'll give you a trial, anyhow. What's your name?"

Patrick told him.

"Well, Lamb," and the proprietor creaked himself out of his chair, revealing incidentally that he wore carpet slippers and had bunions, "come with me and I'll show you Mugivan's Beauties before you go. You can start to-morrow morning."

Obediently Patrick followed his new employer through the turnstile, which was swinging round obligingly by the other attendant, down a narrow white-washed tunnel into a large apartment.

"Ever seen figures before?" inquired Mr. Mugivan.

"Waxworks? Not since I was a kid."

"Hall of Monarchs," said Mr. Mugivan, sucking his teeth with a deprecating sound.

The room in which they found themselves was bare and vault-like; here, too, the walls were white-washed; the floor was covered with a red drugget, and in the middle of the room was placed a sofa upholstered in shabby crimson plush. Yet although bare the room was not empty, but crowded, crowded with a pale throng of mute and stiff and silent figures. They stood in groups, a dais to each group, and were protected from the public by a red cord which imprisoned them, like sheep in a pen, so that had they wished they could not have strayed, but must for ever remain captive. There they stood, and would no doubt stand throughout the ages, these tinsel kings and queens, Plantagenets and Stuarts, Tudors and Hanoverians, calm and blank and dreadfully remote, pallid of cheek and glassy of eye, indifferent to all who passed by to gaze at them—a host of waxen princes, all dead, many of them forgotten, terribly isolated in their garish splendour, uncannily galvanised into a crude semblance of life that yet denied them even the elements of life, leaving them fixed, frozen and staring, while the dust thickened upon their cheap and fusty robes of purple and sham ermine.

Opposite the door through which they had come was another door leading to yet another chamber. Mr. Mugivan led the way.

"Curiosities and Horrors," he explained carelessly. They passed through the second door.

Here was another room, a replica of the first, but more dimly lit, more melancholy even than the Hall of Monarchs, since the illumination that winked upon this dreary scene was greenish, ghastly, such a light as might have been expected to proceed from a sconce of corpse candles. Here were more massed ranks of still, impassive figures, paler than the monarchs in the dim grotto of their melancholy chamber, and more repellent perhaps because their stiff, indifferent bodies were clothed in the garments of everyday and borrowed no majesty from princes' robes, however sham. A skeleton gleamed white in one corner of the room, there was a stuffed ox with six legs, a tiny waxen midget and a giant of local fame. Save for these the room was

peopled only with men who had killed and who had paid the penalty for killing. A throng staring before them, expressionless, rigid, mask-like, brooding perhaps upon their crimes.

Mr. Mugivan seemed more at home in the second room. He became almost conversational.

"Here's Hopkins, the Norwich strangler . . . Tracey, who shot a policeman . . . John Joseph Gilmore, cut the throats of his wife and two children . . ."

They moved across the room. Then, near the slit of a window, crossed by iron bars, Patrick saw her for the first time. She stood on a little dais by herself, a young woman, or, rather, the effigy of a young woman, dressed neatly in dark clothes that were already old-fashioned in cut. She carried herself proudly, like a queen, and whereas the other waxworks were completely expressionless of countenance, this one alone, with proudly curling lips and short, imperious nose, seemed, he thought, actually to live, perhaps because she was disdain incarnate. She stood there easily, gracefully, long, pale hands folded upon her breast, and Patrick, gazing, felt the cool, amused stare of her grey eyes. For a moment his heart leaped sharply, startling him, and he had a sudden impulse to move forward and look more closely at her; then this sensation was succeeded by a creeping feeling of curious discomfort. He was embarrassed; he had to avert his eyes.

"Who's that woman?" he asked impetuously, and then wished that he had not spoken.

Mr. Mugivan answered him casually, with his back turned to the effigy.

"That's Mrs. Raeburn, the poisoner . . . and that's the lot, so come on."

"Mrs. Raeburn? I seem to know the name."

"No doubt, no doubt. It was well enough known at one time."

They walked away, towards the Hall of Monarchs, and Patrick was acutely conscious of the supercilious grey eyes that must be gazing after them. The sham eyes of a sham woman, a waxen effigy! He felt acutely ridiculous.

Mr. Mugivan said no more until they found themselves once again in the little office. Then, offering Patrick a cigarette, he asked suddenly:

"You're not a fanciful sort of chap by any chance?"

"Fanciful? You mean nervous? No, I can't say that I am. Why?"

"No place for fancies, this," confided Mr. Mugivan, waving his hand in the direction of the exhibition; "it's a lonely sort of a job most of the time, and once you start thinking the figures are looking at you, well, you're done, that's all. Last chap we had here took to having fancies. That's why you've got his job."

Patrick felt suddenly rebellious.

"I can safely say I shan't have fancies," he said, laughing. "I may not be particularly brave—in fact I'm not—but I must say it would take more than a parcel of wax dolls to scare me."

"Figures aren't dolls," Mr. Mugivan corrected, shocked.

"Figures, then," and he thought: "Talking of figures, that woman Mrs. Raeburn's got a good one."

But neither he nor Mr. Mugivan mentioned the name of the woman poisoner aloud.

"Nine o'clock to-morrow, then," said Mr. Mugivan.

"Nine o'clock to-morrow."

And so they parted.

He discovered, the next day, two things about his new job. One was that his long and often lonely vigil with the waxworks gave him at times the curious and eerie sensation of being buried alive in a vault filled with the dead, the other that, with the morning, Mrs. Raeburn, poisoner, had become once more a waxen effigy, and was no longer a living, breathing woman. This was comforting, yet in some strange way disappointing, for it was idle to deny that he had thought of her very frequently during the course of the night, and that the prospect of meeting once more the direct gaze of her rather mocking eyes had undoubtedly stimulated him and sent him forth into the cheerless streets kindled with an eager, sparkling excitement which he rather half-heartedly strove to suppress.

As the morning dragged by he studied a catalogue of the exhibition, trying to memorise the many dossiers of princes and murderers. He was accustomed to learn by heart, and in three hours his task was almost complete, yet with one exception. A curious revulsion prevented him from reading, even to himself, the brief account in the catalogue of Mrs.

Raeburn's crime, of discovering, through the medium of one cheap, smudged paragraph, that she had been an infamous woman, a monster of vice and cruelty. Taking a pen-knife from his pocket he cut away from his catalogue all record of her dark deeds. Yet she remained throughout the morning a lifeless effigy, and after glancing at her once, he gladly looked away.

He went out to lunch and returned for the long vigil of the afternoon. Few people came to visit the exhibition: a pair of school-children in charge of a maiden aunt, two girls, who giggled and eyed him coyly, an old man, and an amorous couple who plainly regarded his presence as a nuisance.

It was foggy outside; dusk fell early. For the first time that day, as he paced the Hall of Monarchs, he became sensible of the loneliness of his position. Once again the feeling of being buried among the dead returned to him, intensified this time by a bored and brooding melancholy, whereas in the morning there had also been a sense of adventure. The very tread of his feet, the only sound in the still apartment, smote lugubriously upon his ears. He would have liked to smoke, but this was, of course, forbidden.

At length he turned, and obeying an impulse which was becoming every second stronger, he moved towards the farther chamber, the Hall of Curiosities and Horrors. Here the twilight struck gloomily upon the wan and glimmering faces of the murderers, upturned to greet the first dark, smoky greyness of night: greenish they were once more, and dismal; and very hopeless in the blank resignation of their weary vigil in this dim room that was filled with the very breath of genteel decay.

He went straight towards the figure of Mrs. Raeburn, standing tall and quiet and erect on her dais below the barred window. He had never been so near to her before; their eyes met, and once more she had recaptured that spark of life which had so curiously impressed him on the previous day. He gazed for some moments at her pale, clear-cut face, at her direct, ironic eyes. She appeared to return his scrutiny gravely, earnestly, scornfully, yet with a glint of interest and humour in her regard. She seemed, he thought, a woman well used to curious eyes, well able to defend herself against the stares of the inquisitive. Suddenly, to his immense

astonishment, he spoke to her, and his voice rang out strangely enough in that silent room.

"I wonder what you have done?" he asked her abruptly. "For God's sake, what can you have done that you should be here?"

There was a long pause, during the course of which he continued to examine her closely. Was it his imagination, or did her lips really curve, was there an answering twinkle in her eye? And then he turned sharply, for he had caught, or thought that he had caught, a soft, eager rustling sound from the throng of effigies behind his back. And suddenly he was saved, for two little boys came pattering in to visit the curiosities and horrors.

The next day saw him resolutely keeping to the Hall of Monarchs. Here, with the lifeless dummies of long-dead kings, he was safe. In that other room he realised that he was in peril. And the day after, although he hungered for a glimpse of Mrs. Raeburn's pale face, he still remained aloof. The next day was Saturday, with a steady stream of patrons who would have made the dankest vault seem homely and prosaic. Then Sunday, a holiday.

On Monday he returned to the exhibition ready to laugh at himself for a morbid fool. The rain had stopped; a feeble ray of primrose sunshine, filtering through the barred window of the second chamber, made even Mrs. Raeburn seem little more than a cunningly fashioned doll of life size. And he had spoken to her, as though she were alive and could hear and understand him! He was disgusted with himself.

Yet, with the swiftly flowing dusk the murderers changed once more; assumed as was their wont with the shades of night the vivid and evil personalities they must have worn during their lifetime; seemed to stretch themselves as though released from some long spell of immobility; nodded, perhaps, to one another—even winked; perhaps brushed the dust from their shabby garments, smothered yawns, and waited, quietly expectant, for the closing of the exhibition. So Patrick thought, but it was difficult to see, for the shadows were thick in this lost and forgotten room.

He went towards the effigy of Mrs. Raeburn and was not surprised to find that her eyes, alive and brilliant, almost feverish in their eager intensity, remained fixed direct upon

him as though she waited to see whether he would, after his three days' absence, speak once more to her.

He was, however, silent. He stared at her proud and beautiful mouth, at her long, pale hands, at the white stem of her throat, and admitted to himself that he desired her. Yet he had no immediate wish to touch her, but only longed passionately for the stiff, waxen body of this effigy to melt and transform itself into warm living flesh and blood. Somewhere, somehow, this miracle must be accomplished, for if he was unable to possess her he thought that, such was the spell she had cast upon him, he must inevitably pine and sicken, for she was *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and he was in her thrall. At last he spoke to her, softly, scarcely knowing that he spoke.

"You are a witch," he said, "and you possess me body and soul. You ought to be burnt, and since you are made of wax it should not be difficult to destroy you. . . . I have a good mind to try."

This time there was no mistake; a gleam of sardonic laughter came to her eyes, a strange and elfin smile to her curling lips. She defied him. And, as before, the row of murderers behind seemed to move simultaneously with the rustling murmur of excitement. As before, too, he was saved by a footstep from the outer world. He turned sharply. A woman came into the room.

Patrick stiffened, became once more the respectful and vigilant attendant. The woman hesitated for a moment, then approached him slowly, for she was bent and squat and elderly, and walked with the help of a stick. He noticed vaguely that she was dressed in dingy black, with a frowsy bonnet askew upon her head and a film of veil that partially concealed her face. He bent down politely.

"Yes, madam? Is there anything I can do?"

"There is," said the old woman. Her voice was clear and decisive, the voice of one who is accustomed to command. "I have stupidly neglected to buy a catalogue at the door, and as I am old, and not so good a walker as I was, I wonder if you would save my going back by being kind enough to tell me something about the waxworks. These are murderers, are they not?"

Patrick, only too pleased to occupy his mind in this accustomed fashion, began mechanically:

"Yes, madam. There on my right is Richard Sayers, the Scottish body-snatcher, who shot two men before he was arrested, and protested his innocence to the last. . . . Next to Sayers is Mugivan's conception of Jack the Ripper, the criminal who was never captured. . . . this figure is modelled according to the description of his appearance given to the police by those persons who protested that they had seen him before or after his appalling crimes. . . . Next to Jack the Ripper we have Landru. . . ."

But while his voice droned on he was dreading the moment when they must face Mrs. Raeburn, when he would look once more upon her pale, remote face and meet once again her steady, contemptuous gaze. He lingered beside the midget, the freakish ox, the local giant. The old woman listened to him attentively, beady eyes darting from beneath her heavy veil. Once or twice she asked him a question, but otherwise was silent, seeming pleasantly absorbed in his monotonous catalogue of grim and fiendish crimes. At last the moment dreaded by Patrick could be postponed no longer; at last they faced the figure of Mrs. Raeburn, standing slim and straight and self-possessed beneath the grating window. Suddenly Patrick remembered that he knew nothing of this murderess save that she had killed by poison; here he was speechless and could recite no bloodthirsty dossier, nor did he even know her victim; only that she was young and fair and that she had cast a spell upon him, and these things could not be told to his companion. There was a pause during the course of which the old woman examined the wax figure attentively and in silence. At length he mumbled:

"This is Mrs. Raeburn . . . the poisoner."

As he spoke he shot a sharp glance at the effigy and observed that she was blank and mask-like once more; indifferent both to him and his companion. His witch had again become a waxwork.

The old lady shuffled closer to the figure, peered with a certain attentive inquisitiveness, then turned to him and remarked critically:

"The likeness is not very good."

He was startled, and gaped, unable quite to grasp the purport of her words.

He asked: "You knew her?"

She did not answer him, but said, still peering : " She was taller, she had more dignity, more of an air. And I think she was wilder. But it's long ago," and her face changed all the time.

He asked again, trembling, his hands clammy cold, his voice unconsciously menacing : " You knew her ? "

For the first time the old creature turned to look at him, seeming to observe him closely. She chuckled, and at first he thought that one of the waxworks had laughed, so ghostly, so unexpected, was this little bubbling sound in the quietness of the dim hall.

She said, still chuckling : " I am Mrs. Raeburn."

And as he did not answer she pulled back her veil. She was younger than he had at first supposed. She revealed a fat, gross, heavy-jowled face, sallow, unhealthy, with high Mongolian cheek-bones. Her nose was squat and thick, her cheeks carved with two deep-cut lines running from her nostrils to the corners of her mouth. Her little sharp grey eyes were almost buried in folds of flesh. Beneath the shoddy bonnet a strand of hair hung untidily ; it was dyed a bright orange tint. The face, which leered forth so boldly at Patrick, was seamed and stamped with the marks of every foul and obscene vice ; brazen, debauched, so brutal as to be three parts animal, it seemed to hang in the air, this gargoyle face, to gloat triumphantly upon his horror and confusion. Then, swiftly, the woman whisked back her veil and said crisply, in her clear and resonant voice :

" It didn't do me justice, your image." Then in a moment she was gone, while behind her the effigy of Mrs. Raeburn, poisoner, remained standing cool and pale and remote upon her dais, all the paler, all the cooler, for being now the centre of a flood of cold and frozen moonlight.

Patrick fled after the old woman, not because he wished to see her again, but because of the two of them the waxen image had become the more repulsive, yet, when he reached the Hall of Monarchs, she had already disappeared.

He waited, sick and shivering, until the clock struck seven and the show shut down, then he went in search of Mr. Mugivan, whom he found in his office, reading an evening paper, with his feet on his desk.

" Good evening," said Patrick. " I want to tell you something."

Mr. Mugivan put down his paper.

"My word, young fellow, you look cheap. What is it now?"

Patrick, gulping, said: "Do you know who's been here this afternoon?"

"I do not," said Mr. Mugivan. "I'm proprietor of a waxwork show, not a magician. Who has been here?"

"Mrs. Raeburn. The real Mrs. Raeburn. She came to see her waxwork. She's just gone."

As Mr. Mugivan gaped, his red face became curiously mottled—white and purple in patches, Patrick noticed dispassionately.

"Mrs. Raeburn?"

"Yes."

Mr. Mugivan climbed laboriously from his chair.

"Mrs. Raeburn, eh? Somebody's been pulling your leg. You don't know your catalogue, either. Mrs. Raeburn indeed?"

And he pulled a document from the untidy desk, licked his thumb, and flipped over a page.

"Mrs. Raeburn," he said, speaking very loud and not looking at Patrick, "was scragged—hanged, you understand—hanged by the neck for the murder of her husband more than twenty years ago. That being so, you could hardly have seen her here just now. And that's enough of your funny stuff for one day."

Patrick said nothing. There was really nothing to say. Nor did Mr. Mugivan break the silence, but waddled to and fro about the little room, changing his carpet slippers for boots, struggling into his overcoat, cramming a check cap upon his head. In a moment he had gone.

Patrick switched off the office light, then went forth, as was his custom, to extinguish the gas jets in the exhibition before locking up for the night. His comrade of the turnstile had already gone home; he was alone, entirely alone, with more than a hundred waxen effigies. It was now quite dark outside, for the moon had fled behind a screen of clouds, and there was a rushing sound of strong wind, which swept in gusts past the shuttered windows.

He paused to light a forbidden cigarette, and then it was that he realised with an odd detachment that what he had seen during the afternoon was not a ghost, but something

even more monstrous—a disembodied soul. The foul and evil soul of this wretched woman whose lovely image had bewitched him. The hideous reflection of a hideous mind. Behind her seeming purity and beauty had always been this horror, dormant, waiting to leap forth and devour. The wind rose, moaning, battering at the panes.

On such a night, he mused, as he tramped towards the monarchs, ghouls would surely stalk abroad and witches soar through the air clutching their broomsticks and screaming aloud their lust for Satan. Vampires, sorcerers, fiends. A nightmare pack of horrors. . . . He stretched on tip-toe to lower the gas above the wan, impassive face of King Richard II. . . . And in the old days witches were burnt alive like the guys now consumed by flames each Fifth of November. . . . And after burning he supposed that these evil women could do no more harm, but were destroyed for ever, they and their spells. A good job, too. He entered the second chamber.

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That night the inhabitants of the city were surprised to perceive a crimson flush sweeping the sky above the roof-tops of a distant street. Then came a clanging of bells, a roar of motor-engines, and, hot-foot, in pursuit of the fire brigade, a yelling, excited rabble. Mugivan's Waxwork Exhibition was on fire. No one wanted to miss the show, doubly welcome because it was free.

The wind was strong that night, and licked the flames eagerly, strengthening them until the efforts of the men armed with hose-pipes became pathetic in their futility. At length the roof crashed in, and a wall of roaring flame rose as though to leap into the sky. They were triumphant, these pillars of fire, as though they knew that they were purifying, destroying a witch.

By morning Mugivan's Waxwork Show was a drenched and sooty ruin. Many of the figures were entirely destroyed, the monarchs having been on the whole unluckier than the murderers. Down in the Hall of Curiosities and Horrors there were a few survivors. Some were quite untouched. Mrs. Raeburn, for instance, appeared to have emerged unscathed from the ordeal, and stood upon her dais proudly and gracefully, pale hands folded demurely upon her breast.

And yet, on closer inspection, Mrs. Raeburn proved not to be entirely unharmed. Her waxen face had melted, and running, the stuff had twisted upon her features a strange and devilish sneer. Save for her pride of carriage she was unrecognisable, distorted. And then the firemen made a further discovery.

Lying near by, where the flames had crackled most fiercely, was a charred and sodden bundle of clothing. They bent to examine it. It was, they found, a human body, the body of a young man.

SATAN'S CIRCUS

I ONCE asked a circus artist whom I knew to have worked at one time with the Circus Brandt whether or not he had enjoyed travelling with this well-known show. His reply was a curious one. Swiftly distorting his features into a hideous grimace, he spat violently upon the floor. Not another word would he say. My curiosity was, however, aroused, and I went next to an old Continental clown, now retired, who had the reputation of knowing every European circus as well as he knew his own pocket.

"The Circus Brandt," he said thoughtfully. "Well, you know, the Brandts are queer people, and have an odd reputation. They are Austrian, and their own country-people call them gipsies, by which they mean nomads, for the Brandts never pitch in their own land, but wander the whole world over as though the devil himself were at their heels. In fact, some call them 'Satan's Circus.'"

"I thought," I said, "that the Circus Brandt was supposed to be a remarkably fine show?"

"It is," he said, and lit his pipe; "it's expensive, ambitious, showy, well run. In their way these people are artists, and deserve more success than they have had. It's hard to say why they're so unpopular, but the fact remains that no one will stay with them more than a few months; and, what's more, wherever they go—India, Australia, Rumania, Spain, or Africa—they leave behind them a nasty, unpleasant sort of reputation as regards unpaid bills—which," he added, blowing smoke into the air, "is odd, for the Brandts are rich."

"How many Brandts are there?" I inquired, for I wished to know more about Europe's most elusive circus.

"You ask too many questions," said he, "but this being my last reply to them, I don't mind telling you that there are two, and that they are man and wife—Carl and Lya.

The lady is a bit of a mystery, but if you ask my opinion I would say that she is of Mexican blood, that she was at some time or other a charmer of snakes, and that of the two she is, on the whole, the worse, although that is saying a good deal. However, all this is pure guess-work on my part, although, having seen her, I can tell you that she's a handsome piece, still a year or two on the right side of forty. And now," he said firmly, "I will speak no more of the Circus Brandt."

And we talked instead of Sarrasani, of Krone, of Carmo, and of Hagbeck.

A year passed, and I forgot the Circus Brandt, which no doubt during this period of time wandered from Tokio to San Francisco and Belgrade up to Stockholm and back again, as though the devil himself were at its heels.

And then I met an old friend, a famous juggler, whom I had not seen for many months. I offered him a drink and asked him where he had been since our last meeting. He laughed, and said that he had been in hell. I told him I was not much of a hand at riddles. He laughed again.

"Oh—hell?" he said. "Perhaps that's an exaggeration; but, anyhow, I've been as near to it as ever I want to. I've been touring with the Circus Brandt."

"The Circus Brandt?"

"Exactly. The Balkan States, Spain, North Africa. Then Holland and Belgium, and finally France. I cleared out in France. If they'd doubled my salary I'd not have stayed with them."

"Is the Circus Brandt, then," I asked, "as rough as all that?"

"Rough?" he said. "No, it's not rough. I can stick roughness. What I can't stand, however, is working with people who give me the creeps. Now you're laughing, and I'm not surprised, but I can assure you that I've lain awake at night in my wagon sweating with fear and I'm by no means a fanciful chap."

By this time I was keenly interested.

"Please tell me," I asked, "what it was that frightened you so much."

"That I can't do," he replied, and ordered another drink,

"for the fact is that I, personally, was not treated badly during the tour. The Brandts were very civil to me—too civil, in fact, for they'd ask me into their wagon sometimes for a chat between shows, and I hated going—it gave me gooseflesh down my back. Somehow—and you'll laugh again I know—it was like sitting there talking to two big cats that were just waiting to pounce after they'd finished playing with you. I swear I believed, at the time, that Carl and Lya could see in the dark. Now, of course, that's ridiculous, and I know it, but I still get the creeps when I think about them. I must have been nervy—over-tired, you know, at the time."

I asked whether anyone else at the circus had been similarly affected by the Brandts, and he wrinkled his brows, as though trying to remember, with obvious distaste, any further details of his tour.

"There's one thing that happened so that all could see," he remarked after a pause, "and that was in a wild part of Rumania, somewhere near the Carpathian mountains. We were passing through a little village, on our way to a town a few miles' distance, and the peasants came flocking out to watch us pass, which was, of course, only natural, for the show is a very fine one. Then, in the village street, a van stuck, and the Brandts came out of their big living-wagon to see what had happened."

"Well?" I asked, for he paused again.

"Well, it was funny, that's all. They scattered like rabbits—rushed into their cottages and banged the doors. The wagon was shoved out of the rut and we went on, but in the next village there was no sign of life, for everything was deserted and the doors were barred. But on every door was nailed a wreath of garlic flowers."

"Anything else?" I asked, for he had relapsed into silence.

"Oh, one little thing I remember noticing. The menagerie. The Brandts seldom bother to inspect that part of the show. They're too busy about the ring and the ticket office. But one day she—Mme. Brandt—had to go through the horse-tent and the menagerie to find some agent who was talking to the boys there. It really was a bit odd—the noise was blood-curdling. It was as though the lions and tigers were frightened; not angry, you know, or roaring for their food, but quite a different sort of row. And, when she had gone,

Brandt did not look at him or seem to concern herself with him in any way, but sent her oblique eyes roving over the empty seats of the great tent, yet somehow, in some curious way, it became obvious to her listeners that she was stubbornly determined to drag from him an answer.

Anatole at length muttered :

"I learned the song, Madame, on board a Portuguese fruit-trader many years ago."

Mme. Brandt made no sign of having heard him speak.

After this incident, however, she began to employ the odd hand on various jobs about her own living-wagon, with the result that he had less time to sing and not much time even for his work in the menagerie. Anatole, good-humoured and jovial as he was, soon conceived a violent dislike of the proprietress, and he took no pains to hide it from his friends, who were incidentally in hearty agreement with him on this point. Everyone hated the Brandts; many feared them.

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The circus crossed to Spain and began to tour Andalusia. Several performers left; new acts were promptly engaged. Carl Brandt had always found it easy to rid himself of artists. Ten minutes before the show was due to open he would send for some unlucky trapezist and, pointing to the man's apparatus, complicated and heavy, slung up to one of the big poles, he would say casually :

"I want you to move that to the other side of the tent before the show."

The artist would perhaps laugh, thinking the director was making some obscure joke.

Brandt would then continue, gently :

"You had better hurry, don't you think?"

The artist would protest indignantly.

"It's impossible, sir. How can I move my apparatus in ten minutes?"

Brandt would then watch him, sneering, for a few seconds. Then he would turn away, saying suavely :

"Discharged for insubordination," and walk off to telegraph to his agent for a new act.

Mme. Brandt took a curious perverse pleasure in teasing Anatole. She knew that he feared her, and it amused her

to send for him, to keep him standing in her wagon while she polished her nails or sewed or wrote letters, utterly indifferent to his presence. After about ten minutes she would look up, glancing at some point above his head, and ask him, in her soft, languid voice, if he liked circus life, and whether he was happy with them. She would chat for some time, casually asking him searching questions about the other performers, then suddenly she would look direct at him, with a strange, brooding stare, while she said :
"Better than tramp ships, isn't it, eh? You are more comfortable here than you were as a stoker, I suppose?"

Sometimes she would add :

"Tell me something about a stoker's life, Anatole. What were your duties, and your hours?"

Always, when she dismissed him, his hair was damp with sweat.

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The Circus Brandt wandered gradually northwards towards the Basque country, until the French border was almost in sight. They were to cut across France into Belgium and Holland, then back again. The Brandts could never stay long anywhere. Just before the circus entered French territory Anatole gave his notice to the head keeper. He was a hard worker and so popular with his mates that the keeper went grumbling to Carl Brandt, who agreed to an increase of salary. Anatole refused to stay on.

Mme. Brandt was in the wagon when this news was told to her husband. She said to Carl : "If you want the Alsatian to stay, I will arrange it. Leave it to me. I think I understand the trouble, and, as you say, he is a useful man."

The next day she sent for Anatole, and after ignoring him for about five minutes she asked him listlessly what he meant by leaving them. Anatole, standing rigid near the door, stammered some awkward apology.

"Why is it?"

"I have—I have had offered me a job."

"Better than this?" she pursued, stitching at her work.

"Yes, Madame."

"Yet," she continued idly, "you were happy with us in Africa, happy in Spain. Why not, then, in France?"

"Madame—"

She snapped a thread with her teeth.

"Why not in France, Anatole?"

There was no reply.

Suddenly she flung her sewing to the ground and fixed him with an unswerving glance. Something leaped into her eyes that startled him, an ugly, naked, hungry look that he had never before seen there. Her eyes burned him, like a devil's eyes. She said, speaking rapidly, scarcely moving her lips:

"I will tell you why you are afraid of France, shall I, Anatole? I have guessed your secret, my friend. . . . You are a deserter from the Foreign Legion, and you are afraid of being recaptured. That is it, isn't it? Oh, don't trouble to lie; I have known ever since we were in Africa. It's true, isn't it, what I have said?"

He shook his head, swallowing, unable to speak.

It was a hot day and he wore only a thin shirt. In a second she sprang from her chair across the wagon and threw herself upon him, tearing at this garment with her fingers. Terrified, he struggled, but she was too swift, too violent, too relentless. The shirt ripped in two and revealed upon his white chest the seam of livid scars.

"Bullet wounds!" she laughed in his ear. "A stoker with bullet wounds! I was right, wasn't I, Anatole?"

He was conscious, above his fear, of a strange shrinking sensation of repulsion at her proximity. "God," he thought, "she's after me!" And he was sickened, as some people are sickened by the sight of a deadly snake. And then, surprisingly, he was saved. She darted away from him, sank down in her chair, snatched up her sewing.

Her quick ear had heard the footsteps of Carl Brandt. Anatole stood there dazed, clutching the great rent in his shirt. Carl Brandt entered the wagon softly, for he always wore rubber soles to his shoes. His wife addressed him in her low unflurried voice.

"You see Anatole there? He has just been telling me why he is afraid to come with us to France. He is a deserter from the Foreign Legion. Look at the wounds there, on his chest."

Anatole gazed helplessly at the long, yellow face of Brandt, who stared at him for some moments in silence.

"A deserter?" Brandt said at length, and chuckled.

"A deserter? You needn't be afraid, my lad, to come with us to France. They've something better to do than hunt for obscure escaped legionaries there. Oh, yes, you'll be safe enough. I'll protect you."

And he stood rubbing his hands and staring thoughtfully at Anatole with his gleaming black eyes. Anatole, to escape from them, promised to stay. He had the unpleasant sensation of having faced in the wagon that afternoon not one snake, but two. He disliked reptiles. He meant to bolt, but he had lied to Madame Brandt when he talked of a new job, and he was comfortable where he was. He was, too, an unimaginative creature, and the horrors of the Legion now seemed very remote. Soon he was in France, utterly unable to believe that he was in any danger. To his delight, his mistress ignored him after the scene in the wagon. She had obviously realised, he thought to himself, that he found her disgusting. And he would have been completely happy had he not known that he had made a dangerous enemy.

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The Circus Brandt employed as lion-tamer an ex-matador, a man named "Captain" da Silva. This individual was not best pleased with his situation. He had lost his nerve about a year before, but after working the same group of lions for ten months he had become more confident and consequently more content. Then, without any warning, Carl Brandt bought a mixed group of animals, and told da Silva to start work at once. The tamer was furious. Lions, tigers, bears, and leopards! He shrugged his shoulders and obeyed sulkily. Soon the mixed group was ready for the ring, and appeared for a week with great success.

Then one morning da Silva went to the cages and found his animals in a wild, abnormal state. Snarling, bristling, foaming at the mouth, they seemed unable even to recognise their tamer. A comrade, coming to watch, whispered in his ear:

"She walked last night."

Da Silva shuddered. There was a legend in the Circus Brandt that whenever the animals were nervous or upset Lya Brandt, the "she-devil," had walked in her sleep the night before, wandering into the menagerie and terrifying the beasts, who presumably knew her for what she was.

The tiger roared, and was answered by the lioness. Da Silva turned to his companion.

"I'm off. I wouldn't work these cats to-night for a fortune."

In twenty minutes' time he was at the railway station.

Carl Brandt heard the news in silence. Then he raised his arm and struck his head keeper savagely on the mouth. Wrapping his black cloak about his tall, thin figure, he left the office and sought his own wagon. His wife was engaged drinking a cup of coffee. They eyed each other in silence.

Then she said calmly :

"It's da Silva, I suppose?"

"Da Silva, yes. Already he has gone. Now who will work the mixed group?"

She drained her cup and answered thoughtfully :

"I know of several tamers."

"Probably. And how long will they take to get here?"

"Exactly," she said, pouring out more coffee. "That, I agree, is the great objection. Is there no one on the lot who could work the cats for a week or two?"

"What nonsense are you talking?"

She put her hand over her eyes.

"You seem to forget Anatole. An escaped Legionary in French territory. Would he disobey your orders, do you think?"

There was a pause.

"I'll send for him," said Brandt at length.

They were silent as they waited for the Alsatian. When he came in Lya did not look at him, but began to polish her nails.

Carl Brandt turned his yellow, wrinkled face towards Anatole. His eyes were dark and smouldering hollows. He said gently :

"You know that da Silva has left?"

"Yes, sir." Anatole was perplexed.

"There is no one now to work the animals until a new tamer is engaged."

"No, sir."

"It is not my custom to fail my patrons. I show always what I advertise. The new tamer should be here in a week. It is about this week that I wish to speak."

Another pause. Anatole's heart began to pump against his ribs.

Brandt said placidly :

"I am about to promote you, my friend. For a week you shall work the mixed group."

Anatole turned dusky red. He was furiously angry, so angry indeed that his fear of the silent woman sitting at the table vanished entirely. No longer conscious of her presence he blurted out violently :

"What! You wish me to go in the cage with those animals? Then you must find someone else; I wouldn't do it for a fortune."

Brandt smiled, showing his black, broken teeth. His wife, utterly indifferent, continued to paint her nails bright red. Brandt said pleasantly :

"Are you perhaps in a position to dictate, my friend? I may be wrong, of course, but I am under the impression that we are now in *French territory*. Charming words, eh?"

Anatole was silent. He thought suddenly and with horror of the Legion—blistering sun, filth, and brutality. He thought, too, of the salt-mines, that ghastly living death to which he would inevitably be condemned in the event of capture. Then he remembered the animals as he had last seen them, ferocious, maddened. He shook his head.

"That's bluff," he said shakily. "I'm no tamer. You can't force me into the cage."

Carl Brandt chuckled. The delicate yellow ivory of his skin seamed itself into a thousand wrinkles. He pulled out his watch.

"Five minutes, Anatole, to come with me to the menagerie. Otherwise I telephone the police. If I may be permitted to advise you, I suggest the menagerie. Even the belly of a lion is preferable, I should imagine, to the African salt-mines. But take your choice."

Madame Brandt, snapping an orange-stick in two, now obtruded herself quietly into the conversation.

"No, Anatole," she said musingly, "it will not be possible to run away in the night. The Herr Director will take trouble, great trouble, to have you traced. The Herr Director has no wish to protect criminals."

Once again she looked directly at him, fixing him with the burning and threatening glance that was like a sword.

Brandt glanced at his watch.

"I must remind you, Anatole, that you have only two

minutes left," he said with an air of great courtesy. "How many years did you serve in the Legion, I wonder? And is it eight years in the salt-mines for deserters, or perhaps more?"

"I'll work the animals," said Anatole shortly. He knew that Lya Brandt had read his thoughts, and wiped the sweat from his face as he went towards the menagerie. It was not possible for the mixed group to appear at the *matinée*, but it was announced to the circus in general that the cats would work that night without fail. Anatole was to spend the afternoon rehearsing them.

His face was grey as he shut himself in the cage, armed only with a tamer's switch. Outside the bars stood two, keepers with loaded revolvers. They, too, were nervous. The animals stood motionless to stare at the stranger, hackles raised, restless yellow eyes fixed upon him. Around the cage were arranged painted wooden pedestals, upon which the animals were trained to sit at the word of command. The Alsatian now gave that command. They took no notice. He repeated it louder, slapping the bars with his switch, and they scattered in a sudden panic to take up their accustomed seats. He pulled out the paper hoop through which the lions must jump. They snarled for several minutes, striking out with their savage paws, then, in the end, possibly deciding that obedience was less trouble, they bounded through the loop with an ill grace. The two keepers, and Anatole as well, were soon streaming with perspiration as though they had been plunged into water. The Alsatian was now, however, more confident. He turned to the bears.

Twenty minutes later Carl Brandt rejoined his wife in the living-wagon.

"Better than I expected," said the director coolly. Mme. Brandt made no reply, nor did she turn her head.

That evening the Alsatian was supplied with a splendid sky-blue uniform and cherry-coloured breeches from the circus wardrobe. Out on the lot his comrades glanced at him sympathetically. One or two, unconscious of his antecedents, warned him to defy Brandt and keep out of the cage. Anatole merely shook his head, incapable of giving an explanation.

It was dusk. The bandsmen, splendid in their green and gold uniforms, played the overture inside the huge tent.

A group of clowns, glittering in brilliant spangles, stood waiting to make their comic entry. Behind the clowns six or seven grooms were busy controlling twenty milk-white Arab stallions with fleecy white manes and tails. These horses were magnificent in scarlet trappings. The Chinese troupe, dark kimonos over gorgeous brocade robes, diligently practised near the bears' cage. Anatole sat on a bale of hay near the tigers, deaf to the advice muttered in his ear by various comrades. The circus proceeded.

Up in the dome of the tent two muscular young men in peach-coloured tights flung themselves from bar to bar with thrilling grace and swiftness. Down below, the attendants rapidly constructed a vast cage, staggering beneath sections of heavy iron bars. Soon the band crashed out a chord, and Anatole, the Legionary, steeped into the cage, bowing modestly in response to the applause. Then an iron door was slid aside and down the narrow tunnel crept a file of tawny shapes.

Lions, tigers, leopards, bears. Gracefully they padded into the arena, stretching themselves, rubbing against the bars of the cage, yawning at the bright lights, showing their teeth, slinking with a cat-like agility about the ring.

Gripping his switch, Anatole uttered the first command. One minute later the animals were seated with a certain docility upon their wooden pedestals. Anatole produced his hoop. At first the people of the circus held their breath, then, gradually, as five minutes passed, they relaxed. He was doing well. They sighed with relief. The climax of the act was a tableau during the course of which the animals grouped themselves, standing erect on their hind legs about the trainer, who himself sprang upon a pedestal, arm upraised to give more effect to this subjugation of the beasts. The biggest tiger lay at his feet during the tableau, and while the other animals soon assumed their accustomed positions when ordered, the tiger was at first always unwilling to fling himself upon the sawdust.

Posing the lions and leopards, Anatole, one foot on the pedestal, spoke briskly, curtly, to the great beast, which stared at him sulkily. A second passed, seeming longer than a minute to the circus watchers. The tiger continued to stare, and Anatole, banging at the bars with his switch, pointed stubbornly at the ground at his feet.

His back was towards the ring entrance, and he did not see the grooms and attendants draw back respectfully to allow someone to pass through the red velvet curtains. His comrades did, and nudged one another, for Mme. Brandt seldom came near the arena during a performance. She stood for a moment near the curtains tall and straight in her flowing white dress, her face pale against the dense blackness of her hair.

Then, suddenly, there was tumult in the peaceful cage, as snarling furiously, the animals leaped from their pedestals to dash themselves savagely against the bars. Caught by surprise, Anatole turned, slashing with his switch, shouting, oblivious of the sullen tiger behind him. A leopard, maddened with fright, collided against him and sent him stumbling to the ground. With the fierce swiftness of a mighty hawk, the great tiger sprang. A thick choking growl that made the blood run cold, yells of terror from the crowd, and then the crack of two revolver shots. Armed with hosepipes, the menagerie men drove the animals back. The tiger was wounded in the shoulder, and clawed the ground, biting at itself in a frenzy of pain.

Anatole lay doubled up on the sawdust looking like a rag dummy, so limp and twisted was his body. On the bright blue of his uniform oozed a clotted stream of red. His face? Anatole had no longer a face: only a huge and raw and gaping wound. Opening a side door, they dragged his body from the cage and swiftly wrapped it in the gorgeous coat of a Chinese acrobat standing near by. Screaming, weeping, cursing, the horrified audience fought, struggled and stampeded to leave the tent. In the noise and tumult, Mme. Brandt slipped through the red velvet curtains and vanished like a white shadow.

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That night the body was laid temporarily in a little canvas dressing-room belonging to the clowns. It was late before the show people retired to bed, but by one o'clock in the morning all was still in the tent-town of Brandt's Circus. Only the night watchman, a stolid, unimaginative fellow, paced slowly up and down, swinging his lantern, but from time to time a lion would whimper and growl in the silence of the night.

It was the watchman, however, who afterwards related to his

comrades what he saw during this lonely vigil . . . It was about an hour before dawn, and the man was lolling on a heap of hay, relieved, no doubt, to think the night would soon be over, when all at once his quick ear caught the soft sound of approaching footsteps. He turned, hiding his lantern beneath his coat. It was Mme. Brandt, of course, walking slowly, like a sleep-walker, across the deserted arena towards the dressing-rooms, seeming no more tangible than a shadow, a white shadow that gleamed for a moment in the darkness, and then was gone, swallowed by the gloom of the night. Now, the watchman was a brave fellow, and inclined to be inquisitive. He slipped off his shoes and crept after her.

Madame Brandt glided straight to the little dressing-room wherein lay the mangled body of the Legionary. The watchman had not dared to bring his lantern, and it was, therefore, difficult for him to see what was happening, but at the same time he managed to observe quite enough. He glimpsed her white figure kneeling near the dark shape on the floor; as he watched, she struggled with some drapery or other, and he saw that she was trying to drag away the sheet that covered the corpse. Having apparently achieved her purpose, she remained still for a moment, staring at what she saw; this immobility, which lasted only for a second, was succeeded by a sudden revulsion of feeling more horrible than anything that had gone before; for with all the ferocity of a starving animal she flung herself upon the body, shaking it, gripping it tightly to steady its leaden weight while she thrust her face, her mouth, down upon that torn and bleeding throat . . . then in the distant menagerie the lions and tigers broke the silence of the night with sudden tumult.

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"Yes," said the juggler, after a pause, "we liked Anatole. He was a good comrade, although, mind you, he had probably been a murderer, and most certainly a thief. But in the Circus Brandt, you know, that means nothing at all."

"Where is the Circus Brandt now?" I asked, after another pause.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Poland, I think, or possibly Peru. How can I tell? The Brandts are gypsies, nomads, Here to-day, gone to-

morrow. Possibly they travel fast because there is always something to hush up. But who can say? The devil has an admirable habit of looking after his friends."

I was silent, for I was thinking both of Lya Brandt and Anatole. Suddenly I felt rather sick.

"Look here," I said, "do you mind if we don't talk any more about the Circus Brandt for the moment?"

R. H. MOTTRAM

I Pagliacci

I PAGLIACCI

GINEVER, the lawyer, and young Dormer, from the Bank, had to go over to Seaton about some property of which they were trustees. Their business kept them late enough to lose the last train to Easthampton. So they had a steak and tankard meal at the Old Ship and went off to a performance of "I Pagliacci." Ginever knew it by heart; Dormer thought it was not so good as the "Messiah," but it filled in a vacant end of an empty evening in a rather dour town where people apparently went to bed or to sea when it was dark. Returning, both humming, to the Old Ship, Ginever said:

"Now, Dormer, just one before we turn in!"

Dormer's opinion about drink was that most other people should be teetotallers, but the raw East Coast air of Port Seaton cut through his scruples. That air, like no other on earth, which gives the flavour to the herrings and the ember-like glow to the complexions of that coast, constrains man to call for hot spirits or old ale. Dormer had the latter, while Ginever sipped hot rum and water. Ginever sat recounting the various "Heddass" and "Canios" that he remembered to the empty smoke-room rather than to Dormer, who, pipe in mouth and tankard in hand, prowled along the row of prints that surmounted the wainscot, and stopped before a lithograph entitled "The New Suspension Bridge."

"I can't remember passing that to-day!"

Ginever got up to look, adjusting his glasses.

"No, you didn't pass that to-day—nor has anyone these eighty years!"

"Replaced?"

"Yes, under peculiar circumstances. It used to stand just where the railroad crosses the tail of the estuary; it carried the Easthampton Road, of course."

"Which now has to go right round by Gritling?"

"Yes. But sentiment was very much against rebuilding where this bridge fell in."

"Fell in, did it—all of its own accord?"

"Well, no. There was reason enough. But this is the tale as I heard it when I was little.

"In those days there was no theatre in Seaton. In the summer evenings people went to tea-gardens or beer-houses. In the winter, the middle classes—there has never been any aristocracy in Seaton, the air don't suit 'em—sat on their money-bags, I suppose. The poorer sort went to the same beer-houses. But these last had a respite. Once a year a travelling circus would pitch its tent and park its caravans on that flat piece behind the jetty. I suppose you can't remember a circus? Ah! Barnum or Sanger, yes, but there used in those days to be innumerable small travelling affairs, generally finding their personnel in the Showman's family, with one of two hangers-on who groomed the half-dozen horses, and tended the mangy monkey, and whatever else the show might possess. You got a fair idea of it in the Opera to-night, substituting the English public's love of animals for the Italian love of drama. But one element is constant—the clown. That historic figure who probably began as a vegetation god in Greece, centuries before Christ, still dragged out his endless expiation until, in the red-nosed comedian of the music-hall and Charlie Chaplin of the Cinema, he passed through his final transmogrification and ceased to be recognisable.

"Well, the particular show that came to Seaton in those days was called Winter's World Renowned Circus and Hippodrome. It seems to have been the usual thing—Old Winter, proprietor and ringmaster, his sons acrobats and riders, old Mother Winter sitting on the cash box, the Winter girls snake charmers and equestriennes, and all the rest—publicity, band, *écurie*, comic relief, odd jobs—all done by Signor Puffo, the clown.

"Puffo was, of course, a poor lout who had drifted into the job, God knows why, and kept it, God knows how, with that extraordinary humility and serviceableness of those days, so completely lost now. His name was Boatwright.

"No one remembers what he looked like without his paint and his degrading clothes, his pimple of a hat, his strut and raucous back-chat, for no one ever saw him in

‘private life.’ He had none. During the day he walked the streets in costume, with drum and panpipes for advertisement. From dusk onwards he was in the ring—they didn’t stop at twice nightly then—until there was no more audience who would pay to see him providing the foil to every ‘turn.’ The others had their allotted parts, even the animals. Puffo’s part was to imitate all of them unsuccessfully—to fall off the horses—catch his chin on the tight rope—tie himself into knots like a travesty of the snake. And, at any moment, if the audience were too slow at coming in or too impatient with a ‘turn,’ Old Winter, the tyrant of the ring, would call to him :

“‘Now, Signor Puffo, show the ladies and gentlemen your——!’ At this he would go down on all fours, thereby exposing the fact that the seat of his baggy trousers was marked as a target. Winter, or anybody else would smite him there, crying :

“‘How’s that, Puffo?’ and he would respond :

“‘Quite the Uperzudic, me Lord!’ a meaningless tag that caught on and was the *mot* of the period—between Hot Codlins and Dixie’s Land.

“That is how Puffo Boatwright used to keep the warmth of his body on those bitter nights when the wind whistled through the tent and the tan flew—and the crowd roared at him. *Vesti la Giubba!* I should think he wanted two Giubbas—one to put over his anatomy, starved into suppleness—one to hide his features, that betrayed the humanity of which his fellow humans made such monstrous sport.

“I cannot account for the fact except that Puffo really loved the life. He was, in his perverted way, an artist, I suppose. It was when he went into private life that he collided with Fate. Would you believe it, he got married! Who performed the ceremony, what it was that persuaded his bride to accept him, where they considered they might make a home, except in some spare corner of a tent or caravan, it does not appear. All our modern forestalling of life, provision for children, education, old age, and infirmity, was clean beyond their outlook. All that is certain is that she was a Port Seaton girl. She belonged here, to this town, to which the show came once a year.

“Well, their matrimonial adventure did not last long. On the very first occasion that they came in the course of

the tour to Port Seaton, Mrs. Boatwright fell in love. Whether she had omitted this indispensable preliminary in the case of her husband—whether the life of a travelling circus was too hard for her—whether she suffered from home sickness I do not know. Certain it is that she suddenly began to show a marked coolness towards her husband and a marked preference for—whom do you think?

“There had grown up in one of the narrow, sea-breeze-swept yards of the town a great, long-shinned fair-haired boy who, like all his sort, at the age of twelve was taken aboard one of those lumbering, mizzen-masted fishing smacks that have only just been replaced by steam drifters, and taught his trade with a thoroughness that did not stop short of blows and plenty of physical danger. There was nothing remarkable about him except his height, which kept on increasing. He soon outstripped the fairly high average of the fishermen, and became a phenomenon.

“The men who go out to fish in the North Sea are not easily surprised. With even greater difficulty can they be moved to express wonder or admiration. The young giant’s growth was celebrated by a good deal of clumsy sarcasm, and rewarded by a lot of extra work. He could reach things that no other man could reach. He was told to reach and go on reaching, to make himself useful amid the endless gruelling labour of a hard trade. He was conspicuous, and as his conspicuousness had nothing to do with money or power he was a butt for rough-edged humour. There could be no give and take about it—he was unique. He tried to use physical violence to stop the excessive burden of this ridicule. He was knocked down by a maul used for stunning conger. The blow which would have killed most men shook his senses together.

“Whether he was not yet entitled to a share in his boat, whether he was and sold it, I don’t know. He walked off at the end of a short cruise and presented himself to Winter, who took him on at once. He had the handiness of his sort, and could do some tricks with ropes and light spars, climb to the roof of the tent and slide down astonishingly. But such feats were commonplace to the local audience. His ungainliness and his foolish face—blank with stage fright and the unaccustomed publicity—made him a comic turn rather than a thrill. He competed with Puffo rather than

with the riders and animals. He did not compete long.

"It may have been some foolish boast of his, that he was well quit of fishing and could earn more money at the Circus. Or it may have been the awkward humour of the long-shore crowd, the last in the world to honour local talent. Anyhow, Winter heard the rumour that when the fleet came in the crews would raid the Circus and have the 'giant' out of it. Winter did not wait. He sent the boy away to some related or acquainted showman at a safe distance, beyond London.

"But what was the commotion in Seaton when it was known that he had gone, and not alone. Mrs. Boatwright had gone with him. Her choice in her second matrimonial adventure was as difficult to understand as her first, except on the base ground that the giant had more future before him than the clown. But any one can imagine the plight of Signor Puffo, deserted before that mainly nonconformist public. There was something worse than Tragedy in it. The seducer may be a hero to discontented women or young bloods. But to the mass of the public he has infringed the Law of Property, and the more solid sympathies are bound to be with the aggrieved husband. Here comes the rub. Tell the tale to any listener. 'She ran off with the Giant from the Circus.' However solemnly you say it, the emotion you arouse is not tragic. It is comic. Now place the incident in Seaton air before the Seaton public. See poor Puffo strutting the streets with drum and pipe the morning that it became known. Can't you hear the yell of derision?

"Puffo heard it, you may be sure; felt it too, no doubt, Seaton being a rough place. He refused for the first time in his career to do the necessary advertising of the show about the streets in person. Then he found he had run up against another Law of Property. Old Winter was already doubtful of the temper of his audiences, among whom these events had diminished the usual restraints and rather stimulated the latent element of horse-play. He insisted that something new and striking was necessary. He told Puffo that in the unmeasured terms of an autocrat. And out of the isolated misery of his bleeding heart Puffo evolved a stroke of genius greater than all the drudging success of his years of clowning put together. He enlarged his idea to Old Winter, who was so impressed by it that he actually had handbills printed and distributed announcing that Signor Puffo, the celebrated

Clown of Winter's World Renowned Show, would parade the River and pass beneath the New Suspension Bridge in a pleasure pinnace, drawn by four white swans, on Boxing Day next.

"It sounds queer, but those were romantic days when the spirit of wonder was abroad, and folk saw nothing absurd in such a proclamation. Nor were they disappointed. Puffo did not intend that they should be. I have it from an eye-witness—an old ferry-man, whose trade had been destroyed by the opening of the New Suspension Bridge, and who was not disappointed either. Puffo did appear in what was either a large tub or va., decorated with ribands and attached to four—geese, not swans. That was the only piece of deception, together with the fact that the birds did not pull his craft. They were fastened by the neck, squawked and swam, and the outgoing tide carried them down beneath the bridge. For, after all, it was not so very difficult. Puffo Boatwright was a Seaton man, had been in and out of boats all his life. It did not take much calculation any more than it took much steering to keep in midstream. Nor to see that the geese would go that way. Nor to be certain that the crowd would flock on to the New Suspension Bridge to pelt him with rubbish. Again, he always set up and took down the seating of Winter's Circus, and if he had no theory of stresses and strains, had some rule of thumb to tell him how many people could be borne on a support of a certain thickness. Suspension bridges, you know, are very safe except against a sudden concerted movement. That was just it. That was where despair and hatred had combined to give the obscure clown a touch of genius. He was greater at that moment as an artist than ever before or after. He saw that his enemies were The Public—the historic enemy of all artists—that they would rush together to one side of the bridge—that the new supports would give way—the whole structure open out like a burst basket, spilling them all in the deep, icy water of the estuary at flood. For that is what happened. It was worthy to rank with the Noyades of Nantes.

"My informant, the old ferryman, was naturally impressed. He spent all the rest of the day rescuing those who lived and fishing out the dead. It was the biggest disaster he had ever seen. It was also the most profitable thing that ever happened to him, for, as I have said, sentiment prevented the building

of another bridge on the same spot and set his ferry going again. Also, he had the graphic touch of all illiterates who have to find their own primitive imagery for what they see. He used to describe the extraordinary change in the faces of the crowd when they felt the bridge give beneath them. He used to say: 'One minit they was all slit-mouthed wi' larfin,' the next they was har' par' six wi' fright.' Do you know the disconnected look of a church clock when both hands cover each other downwards?"

"And what happened to—er—Boatwright? Dormer had put down his empty tankard, and was knocking out his pipe on the bar of the grate.

"I never could discover. Art demands that he should have drowned with his victims. Justice also. The tidal wave caused by the fall of all those hundreds of human beings and all that timber into the river must have upset his wash-tub. But the old ferryman was silent on that point. I could never get him to say. Certainly the name is not among the list of victims. That was the real Tragedy. The whole episode became, not the Clown's Revenge, but the Accident to the Suspension Bridge. I suppose some sort of inquiry was held, according to the lights of those days, and the Coroner was in evidence, of course. But of Puffo and his broken heart very few ever heard. The Comedy was ended in the truest sense of the word!"

"It's a rum yarn!"

"It is. Good-night!"

ALPHONSE DAUDET

The Elixir of the Rev. Father Gaucher

THE ELIXIR OF THE REV. FATHER GAUCHER

"SIP this, my friend. It would made a dumb man eloquent," said the minister of Graveson, as he poured out drop by drop, in measured cadence, a thimbleful of the most exquisite nectar that ever gladdened the inner man.

"It is the Elixir of Father Gaucher, the glory, the stimulant divine of our Heaven-blessed Provence. It is made at the Convent of the Prémontré Canons, two leagues from your Mill. The finest of the much-vaunted chartreuses is but small beer in comparison. This Elixir has a history, too piquant, you may think, for the lips of a reverend churchman, but, M. Daudet, even saints have their off-days."

Then leaning back in his arm-chair, in the snug dining-room of the Parsonage, hung with dainty curtains and with pictures of the Passion, the Abbé commenced the story of the Elixir, apocryphal in parts, and spiced here and there with a dash of profanity in the style of Erasmus and Charles d'Assouci.

"Twenty years ago the Canons of Prémontré, or the White Fathers as we call them in Provence, had fallen on evil days. The convent was tumbling about their ears. The outer walls and the Tower of St. Pacôme were crumbling in pieces.

"Grass grew in the cloisters, the pillars were cracking, the saints were wasting away in their niches. Not a window, not a door, was intact. The wind from the Rhône swept through the courtyards and the chapels, as it sweeps across the waste of Camargue, extinguishing the tapers, breaking the leaded panes, and spattering the holy water. But the most depressing feature of all was the silent clock-tower, tenantless as a deserted dove-cote. No silver convent bell summoned the Fathers to matins, only the painful parody of almond-wood castanets.

"Oh, poverty-stricken Fathers! I can vividly recall your piteous procession on Corpus Christi Day. Your threadbare cloaks, your pale faces and dejected mien, your frames

emaciated with the hermit fare of citrons and water-melons. And your worthy Abbé, the last of the train, his head bent, all too painfully conscious of his tarnished cross and moth-eaten mitre.

"The sisters wept as the monks filed past, but the coarse, lusty banner-bearers sneered at their miserable plight. Monks, like starlings, grow lean when there's not enough to go round, so, no longer able to keep body and soul together, there seemed no alternative but to quit the Convent and wander forth into the world in search of new pastures.

"One day, when the situation was being discussed by the Chapter, word was brought to the Priory that Brother Gaucher could disclose an infallible specific for poverty and woe, and was waiting outside for an audience.

"Brother Gaucher, I must tell you, was the cow-herd at the Convent, if the term could be applied to one whose duty consisted in tending two emaciated cows as they cropped the scanty herbage growing in the chinks of the flag-stones of the establishment. He had been brought up by a roving, half-witted woman of Baux, who called herself his aunt.

"When he was twelve years old the monks took him into the Convent. He was despised as a brainless clod, fit only to drive cattle, and capable, intellectually, only of mumbling the Paternoster in his native patois. Though physically robust, he never rebelled against his superiors, and kissed the rod of contempt with the exemplary meekness of a Christian. Sometimes, however, he saw visions and dreamt dreams. 'One of Brother Gaucher's visions will be a diversion,' thought the Chapter, so he was ushered in.

"An outburst of derisive merriment greeted his entrance, so grotesque were his unwieldy bulk, his uncouth gestures, his clownish gait. In making obeisance he nearly tripped himself up backwards. But the clown had the sense of humour, as, fumbling with his beads, he naïvely remarked :

"'May it please your Reverences ! It's an old saying, but it's a true saying, that the emptiest vessels make the most noise. I've been turning over and over my clod of a pate, and at last drops out a treasure. You know my old Aunt Bégon who took care of me when I was a youngster ? Peace to her soul, poor body ! But the old hussy could sing a comic song after a sip of her Elixir ! Well, the body was always on the tramp, and knew the taste of every stimulating

herb of the mountain-side better than the most wide-awake old Corsican blackbird. And she knew how to keep a good thing to herself. Well, after many a year of wandering, picking, tasting, and mixing, she lighted on a concoction of the choicest piquancy. Although it's many a year since I helped her cull the herbs, I think that under the guidance of St. Augustine, with the permission of our good Father Abbé, and by taking pains, I could recover the secret of the wondrous Elixir. I should know the taste of it again. You would only have to bottle it and sell it at a fancy price to fill your coffers with golden louis. Then you might hold your heads as high as the haughty Brothers of La Trappe and the Grande Chartreuse !'

"The Chapter leapt to their feet. The Prior threw his arms round Gaucher's neck. The Canons grasped his hands. The Treasurer's gratitude was unbounded—he kissed the tattered hem of the Brother's sackcloth gown. The excitement having subsided and deliberations resumed, the Chapter decided unanimously to hand over the cows to Brother Thrasybulus, leaving Brother Gaucher free to pursue the quest of the Elixir.

"It sufficeth to say that the recipe was found. When, how, where, Gaucher alone knows. History is in the dark. That the Brother was neither dolt nor laggard is decisively proved by the fact that, in less than six months, not a single farmhouse or cottage throught the Comtat and the region around Arles but could show in the locked pantry cupboard, between the bottles of home-made wine and the jars of picholine olives, a little brown earthenware flagon, its seal stamped with the arms of Provence, its label all-glorious with—a Monk in Raptures on a Silver Ground.

"By the magic succours of Aunt Bégons's Elizir, wealth poured into the Convent Treasury. The crumbling fabric was restored, the monks' penury relieved, the Prior was resplendent in vestments new, and the next Resurrection dawn was ushered in by the strains of virgin bells pealing forth full-throated pœans of thanksgiving.

"The despised lay-brother Gaucher, whose clownish bearing had excited the Chapter's mirth, was buried in oblivion. Were Brother Gaucher asked for at the Convent, it was replied, 'There's no such Brother here—perhaps you mean the Reverend Father Gaucher ?'

"The Father lived apart from the humdrum life of the Cloister, immersed in his distillery, the Superior of thirty monks who scoured the mountain in search of herbs. A disused chapel, standing apart at the foot of the Canons' garden, served as distillery. It was an inviolable sanctum, forbidden ground even to the Prior himself. The unsophisticated Fathers regarded it with fear and trembling, a place of deep, perhaps unhallowed, mysteries. Should a venturesome, prying Brother scale the vine and peep in at the rose window, a moment's glance at the nectromantic array took away his breath.

There stood the black-bearded Father Gaucher, hydrometer in hand over a steaming furnace. Around were retorts of red-sandstone, gigantic stills, spiral condensing pipes, a bizarre sorcerer-like equipment blazing uncannily through the red panes of the window. Aghast at his own temerity, Peeping Tom would scramble down the vine as if the devil were in pursuit.

"At sunset, when the last Angelus was rung, a door in the distillery was cautiously opened, and His Reverence walked forth to Evensong. The Brothers lined up on either side with hushed respect. 'He has the secret,' was faintly whispered. The Treasurer followed with bent head. As the Father advanced through the awe-struck throng, a wide-brimmed hat encircling the back of his head like an aureole, he fanned his face, looked with serene self-complacency on the courts planted with orange trees, on restored roofs with newly-gilded weather-cocks, on the dazzling whiteness of the Cloister, its elegant columns crowned with carved capitals, on the spick-and-span vestments of the Canons.

"'All these are yours, Gaucher,' said His Reverence to himself.

"Yes, he walked with conscious pride. But pride goes before a fall, as is exemplified in the sequel.

"Picture the scene one evening at Vespers when Father Gaucher burst in upon the worshippers, breathless, flushed, reeling, his cowl all awry, plunging into the holy water right up to his elbow. At first the monks thought that, his distillery duties having detained him, he was flustered at finding himself late; but when he turned his back to the High Altar, made obeisance to the organ and galleries, scudded up the nave like a madman, staggered through the chancel, plunged into

his stall with a crash, and rocked from side to side, gazing round with sactimonious serenity, a buzz of pious horror filled the chapel. The monks whispered behind their byeviaries:

“ ‘What’s possessed the Father to-night?’ ”

“ ‘Twice the Prior struck his crosier on the floor to command silence. The choir continued the chants, but the responses were scarcely audible. In the middle of the *Ave Verum* Gaucher raised himself in his stall and struck up in stentorian tones one of Aunt Bégon’s comic songs :

“ ‘There lived a monk in gay Paree,

Patatin, Patatan, Tarabin, Taraban.

He kissed a nun with golden hair,

Tarabin, Patatan, Patatin, Taraban.

“ ‘Golden hair, golden hair.’ ”

“ ‘The congregation were scandalised. They rose in a body amidst shouts of ‘Turn him out, he has a devil!’ The Canons crossed themselves in holy horror. The Prior waved his crosier frantically. Father Gaucher rocked and smiled, blissfully unconscious of anything wrong. Two sturdy monks rushed forward and hustled the offender out at a side door, the delinquent struggling violently, and vociferating at the pitch of his voice :

“ ‘Golden hair, golden hair.’ ”

“ ‘The next day—that morrow which chasteneth the night before—was a day of penance.

“ ‘At dawn the culprit is seen on his knees in the Prior’s oratory making a full confession with streaming eyes.

“ ‘Monseigneur, alas, the Elixir had got me into its grip!’ he said, beating his breast.

“ ‘The Prior was not a stern man and was deeply moved at the penitent’s contrition.

“ ‘My dear Gaucher, be calm! The little incident of last night, well, the impromptu outburst of song could not be ignored, but the morning sun dispels the mists of night. Really, there’s no harm done. The novices were away at the back, and probably thought some recondite ceremonial was being performed, one whose mystery had not yet been revealed to babes and sucklings. But between ourselves I should like to know the real facts. It was the Elixir, of course? Your tasting hand was rather heavy, perhaps? You were running the risk of all scientific pioneers. You’re another Brother Schwartz of gunpowder fame, the victim

of your own invention. Be frank, my dear fellow; your life is precious, we owe you everything. Could some tasting instrument be contrived?

"'Monseigneur, a gauge can test the strength and temperature, but the subtle bouquet, the velvety softness elude all but the most exquisitely sensitive of human tongues.'

"'So far, so good. But—be frank—does your exquisitely sensitive tongue really relish the tasting process, or is it a compelling duty?'

"'Alas, Monseigneur,' confessed the much-tried penitent, 'on the last two evenings the bouquet, the aroma were quite overpowering. I felt myself in the grip of the Tempter. Now I am resolved at any price to use only the testing-tube, even though the pearl should lose its fineness and connoisseurs reject an inferior brand.'

"'Stop!' cried the Prior excitedly, 'do nothing rash! We must study our clients. Listen! Keep a watch on yourself. What would you consider a safe maximum dose? Fifteen drops? Make it twenty. Even after twenty the devil would need to rise very early in the morning to catch you napping. But as a precaution against eventualities, I dispense henceforth with your attendance at Evensong. You can observe it privately in the distillery. Now depart in peace, Reverend Father, and—count your drops.'

"Alas, the Reverend Father needed all his arithmetic to keep the Tempter at bay!

"Evensong in the distillery was unique.

"All went well during the day-time. The Father heated his furnaces and stills, sorted carefully the herbs, those incomparable herbs of Provence, delicate, intoxicating, serrated, warmed and scented through and through with the meridional sun. But at eventide, when the herbs were infused, and the Elixir simmering in the huge copper cauldrons, the Father's martyrdom began.

"Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty!

"The drops fell from the pipe one by one into a silver-gilt goblet. 'This is the Prior's limit,' said Gaucher, swallowing them at a gulp. 'Simply insipid,' was the verdict. 'It's only when you get to the twenty-first drop that the spirit begins to tickle.'

"Oh, the longing after the twenty-first drop!

"'Lead us not into temptation,' groaned the Father, as

he fell upon his knees at the far end of the distillery, repeating the Paternoster with unctuous vehemence. As the temperature of the liquid rose, its aroma was heightened. As the fumes circled round the head of the kneeling monk, a subtle fascination drew him irresistibly to the steaming cauldrons. He stood spellbound, with dilated nostrils, as he reverently stirred the scintillating green and gold nectar. He saw in the glittering bubbles dancing on the emerald flood the alluring twinkles of Aunt Bégon's witch-like eyes.

"'Just one more drop,' and another, and so on, until the goblet was full to the brim. Then he fell back into a large arm-chair, and, stretched at his ease, with half-closed eyes, sipped drop by drop the soul-damning potion, muttering between alternate fits of sinning and repentance :

"'Lost, lost, irretrievably lost !'

"Having drained the last drop, lo and behold, at the bottom of the cup was a complete edition of Aunt Bégon's comic ditties ! They were 'The Three Little Gossips who went out for a Spree,' 'The Maid and the Monk who met in the Wood,' and of course the immortal 'Patatin, Patatan' of the White Monk.

"The next morning he was accosted by his fellow-sleepers with :

"'Father Gaucher, you had fairy dreams last night !'

"Then followed tears, despair, fasting, hair shirts, penance. But all to no purpose. Every night the Tempter triumphed.

"The Fathers were inundated with orders. They came from Nîmes, Aix, Avignon, Marseilles. The languishing Convent became a hive of industry. A well-organized division of labour was established. The brothers became packers, labellers, book-keepers, carters. Fewer beads were told, fewer Masses said. The souls of the departed were left to their Redeemer's keeping, the bodies of the living fortified with the bread of toil.

"On one fine Sunday morning, as the Treasurer was reading his yearly financial statement before a full Chapter, the eyes of the Canons glistening, their ears tingling with joy, their faces wreathed with smiles, Father Gaucher burst into the assembly.

"'I've done with the Elixir !' Let him make it who will ! I'll go back to the cows.'

"The Prior was stunned.

"What do you mean, Father Gaucher?"

"Mean? Mean that I'm galloping headlong to perdition! Drinking! drinking! drinking!"

"But didn't I tell you to count the drops?"

"And haven't I counted them? Yes by the cupful! Three bottles a night! No mortal can stand it! Gaucher has washed his hands of the soul-perilling mixture."

"The Chapter looked glum."

"Would you ruin us?" said the Treasurer, brandishing his ledger excitedly.

"Would you send me to perdition?"

"The Prior intervened."

"Reverend Fathers," he said, deprecatingly spreading out his lily-white hand on which glittered the pastoral ring, "I have a way out of the difficulty. It is in the evening, is it not, when the Tempter assails you?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, in the evening and every evening. As night approaches a clammy perspiration comes over me like that which assailed Capitou's ass when he saw the saddle brought out."

"Fear nothing, my dear boy! Henceforth at Evensong we will put up on your behalf the orison of St. Augustine, which carries plenary indulgence. Whatever happens, you will be safe. Commission and absolution will synchronize."

"Thanks unspeakably, Monseigneur!"

"Father Gaucher asked no more. He returned to his alembics carolling like a lark."

"Faithful to compact, the officiating priest never failed to put up after Compline an intercessory prayer for the tempted Father who was risking his soul for others' good."

"Looking into the chapel at Evensong, we see the white-hooded monks kneeling in grateful devotion, as the orison steals over their heads like a night-breeze over St. Bernard's snows. And in the stillness there is wafted from the red-lit distillery the sonorous fortissimo of Father Gaucher:

'There lived a monk in gay Patee,
Patatin, Patatan.'

"I've come to the end of my yarn," said the Abbé.
"Luckily none of my parishioners have been present."

LAFCADIO HEARN

The Story of Ming-Y

THE STORY OF MING-Y

FIVE hundred years ago, in the reign of the Emperor Houng-Wou, whose dynasty was *Ming*, there lived in the city of Genii, the city of Kwang-tchau-fu, a man celebrated for his learning and for his piety, named Tien-Pelou. This Tien-Pelou had one son, a beautiful boy, who for scholarship and for bodily grace and for polite accomplishments had no superior among the youths of his age. And his name was Ming-Y.

Now, when the lad was in his eighteenth summer, it came to pass that Pelou, his father, was appointed Inspector of Public Instruction at the city of Tching-tou; and Ming-Y accompanied his parents thither. Near the city of Tching-tou lived a rich man of rank, a high commissioner of the government, whose name was Tchang, and who wanted to find a worthy teacher for his children. On hearing of the arrival of the new Inspector of Public Instruction, the noble Tchang visited him to obtain advice in this matter and happening to meet and converse with Pelou's accomplished son, immediately engaged Ming-Y as a private tutor for his family.

Now, as the house of this Lord Tchang was situated several miles from town, it was deemed best that Ming-Y should abide in the house of his employer. Accordingly the youth made ready all things necessary for his new sojourn, and his parents, bidding him farewell, counselled him wisely, and cited to him the words of Lao-tseu and of the ancient sages :

“By a beautiful face the world is filled with love : but Heaven may never be deceived thereby. Shouldst thou behold a woman coming from the East, look thou to the West ; shouldst thou perceive a maiden approaching from the West, turn thy eyes to the East.”

If Ming-Y did not heed this counsel in after days, it was

only because of his youth and the thoughtlessness of a naturally joyous heart.

And he departed to abide in the house of Lord Tchang, while the autumn passed, and the winter also.

When the time of the second moon of spring was drawing near, and that happy day which the Chinese call *Hoa-tchao*, or "The Birthday of a Hundred Flowers," a longing came upon Ming-Y to see his parents; and he opened his heart to the good Tchang, who not only gave him the permission he desired, but also pressed into his hand a silver gift of two ounces, thinking that the lad might wish to bring some little memento to his father and mother. For it is the Chinese custom on the feast of *Hoa-tchao*, to make presents to friends and relations.

That day all the air was drowsy with blossom perfume, and vibrant with the droning of bees. It seemed to Ming-Y that the path he followed had not been trodden by any other for many long years; the grass was tall upon it; vast trees on either side interlocked their mighty and mossgrown arms above him, beshadowing the way; but the leafy obscurities quivered with birdsong, and the deep vistas of the wood were glorified by vapours of gold, and odorous with flower-breathings as a temple with incense. The dreamy joy of the day entered into the heart of Ming-Y; and he sat him down among the young blossoms, under the branches swaying against the violet sky, to drink in the perfume and the light, and to enjoy the great sweet silence. Even while thus reposing, a sound caused him to turn his eyes toward a shady place where wild peach-trees were in bloom: and he beheld a young woman, beautiful as the pinkening blossoms themselves, trying to hide among them. Though he looked for a moment only, Ming-Y could not avoid discerning the loveliness of her face, the golden purity of her complexion, and the brightness of her long eyes that sparkled under a pair of brows as daintily curved as the wings of the silk-worm butterfly outspread. Ming-Y at once turned his gaze away, and, rising quickly, proceeded on his journey. But so much embarrassed did he feel at the idea of those charming eyes peeping at him through the leaves, that he suffered the money he had been carrying in his sleeve to fall, without being aware of it.

A few moments later he heard the patter of light feet

running behind him, and a woman's voice calling him by name. Turning his face in great surprise, he saw a comely servant-maid, who said to him, "Sir, my mistress bade me pick up and return to you this silver which you dropped upon the road." Ming-Y thanked the girl gracefully, and requested her to convey his compliments to her mistress. Then he proceeded on his way through the perfumed silence, athwart the shadows that dreamed along the forgotten path, dreaming himself also, and feeling his heart beating with strange quickness at the thought of the beautiful being that he had seen.

It was just such another day when Ming-Y, returning by the same path, paused once more at the spot where the gracious figure had momentarily appeared before him. But this time he was surprised to perceive, through a long vista of immense trees, a dwelling that had previously escaped his notice—a country residence, not large, yet elegant to an unusual degree. The bright blue tiles of its curved and serrated double roof, rising above the foliage, seemed to blend their colour with the luminous azure of the day: the green-and-gold designs of its carved porticos were exquisite artistic mockeries of leaves and flowers bathed in sunshine. And at the summit of terrace-steps before it, guarded by great porcelain tortoises, Ming-Y saw standing the mistress of the mansion—the idol of his passionate fancy—accompanied by the same waiting-maid who had borne to her his message of gratitude.

While Ming-Y looked he perceived that their eyes were upon him; they smiled and conversed together as if speaking about him; and, shy though he was, the youth found courage to salute the fair one from a distance. To his astonishment the young servant beckoned him to approach; and opening a rustic gate half-veiled by trailing plants bearing crimson flowers, Ming-Y advanced along the verdant alley leading to the terrace with mingled feelings of surprise and timid joy. As he drew near, the beautiful lady withdrew from sight; but the maid waited at the broad steps to receive him, and said as he ascended:

"Sir, my mistress understands you wish to thank her for the trifling service she recently bade me do you, and requests

that you will enter the house, as she knows you already by repute, and desires to have the pleasure of bidding you good day."

Ming-Y entered bashfully, his feet making no sound upon a matting elastically soft as forest moss, and found himself in a reception chamber, vast, cool and fragrant, with scent of blossoms freshly gathered. A delicious quiet pervaded the mansion; shadows of flying birds passed over the bands of light that fell through the half-blinds of bamboo; great butterflies with pinions of fiery colour found their way in, to hover a moment about the painted vases and pass out again into the mysterious woods.

And noiselessly as they, the young mistress kindly greeted the boy, who lifted his hands to his breast and bowed low in salutation. She was taller than he had deemed her, and supple-slender as a beauteous lily; her black hair was interwoven with the creamy blossoms of the *chu-sha-kih*; her robes of pale silk took shifting tints when she moved, as vapours change hue with the changing of the light.

"If I be not mistaken," she said, when both had seated themselves after having exchanged the customary formalities of politeness, "my honoured visitor is none other than Tien-chou, surnamed Ming-Y, educator of the children of my respected relative, the High Commissioner Tchang. As the family of Lord Tchang is my family also, I cannot but consider the teacher of his children as one of my own kin."

"Lady," replied Ming-Y, not a little astonished, "may I dare to inquire the name of your honoured family, and to ask the relation which you hold to my noble patron?"

"The name of my poor family," responded the comely lady, "is *Ping*—an ancient family of the city of Tching-tou. I am the daughter of a certain Sië of Moun-hao; Sië is my name, likewise; and I was married to a young man of the Ping family, whose name was Khang. By this marriage I became related to your excellent patron. But my husband died soon after our wedding, and I have chosen this solitary place to reside in during the period of my widowhood."

There was a drowsy music in her voice, as of the melody of brooks, the murmurings of spring; and such a strange grace in the manner of her speech as Ming-Y had never heard before.

Yet, on learning that she was a widow, the youth would

not have presumed to remain long in her presence without a formal invitation; and after having sipped the cup of rich tea presented to him he arose to depart. Sië would not suffer him to go so quickly.

"Nay, friend," she said, "stay yet a little while in my house, I pray you; for should your honoured patron ever learn that you have been here and that I had not treated you as a respected guest and regaled you even as I would him I know that he would be greatly angered. Remain at least to supper."

So Ming-Y remained, rejoicing secretly in his heart, for Sië seemed to him the fairest and sweetest being he had ever known, and he felt that he loved her more than his father and his mother. And while they talked the long shadows of the evening slowly blended into one violet darkness; the great citron-light of the sunset faded out: and those starry beings that are called the Three Councillors, who preside over life and death and the destinies of men, opened their cold, bright eyes in the northern sky.

Within the mansion of Sië the painted lanterns were lighted; the table was laid for the evening repast; and Ming-Y took his place at it, feeling little inclination to eat, and thinking only of the charming face before him. Observing that he scarcely tasted the dainties laid upon his plate, Sië pressed her young guest to partake of wine; and they drank several cups together. It was a purple wine, so cool that the cup into which it was poured became covered with vapoury dew; yet it seemed to warm the veins with strange fire. To Ming-Y, as he drank, all things became more luminous as by enchantment; the walls of the chamber seemed to recede and the roof to heighten; the lamps glowed like stars in their chains, and the voice of Sië floated to the boy's ears like some far melody heard through the spaces of a drowsy night. His heart swelled; his tongue loosened, and words flitted from his lips that he had fancied he could never dare to utter. Yet Sië sought not to restrain him; her lips gave no smile, but her long bright eyes seemed to laugh with pleasure at his words of praise and to return his gaze of passionate admiration with affectionate interest.

"I have heard," she said, "of your rare talent, and of your many elegant accomplishments. I know how to sing a little, although I cannot claim to possess any musical

learning ; and now that I have the honour of finding myself in the society of a musical professor, I will venture to lay modesty aside, and beg you to sing a few songs with me. I should deem it no small gratification if you would condescend to examine my musical compositions."

"The honour and gratification, dear lady," replied Ming-Y, "will be mine ; and I feel helpless to express the gratitude which the offer of so rare a favour deserves."

The serving-maid, obedient to the summons of a little silver gong, brought in the music and retired. Ming-Y took the manuscripts, and began to examine them with eager delight. The paper on which they were written had a pale yellow tint, and was light as a fabric of gossamer ; but the characters were antequely beautiful, as though they had been traced by the brush of Hei-song Ché-Tchoo himself—that divine Genius of Ink, who is no bigger than a fly ; and the signatures attached to the compositions were the signatures of Youen-tchin, Kao-pien, and Thou-mou—mighty poets and musicians of the dynasty of Thang ! Ming-Y could not repress a scream of delight at the sight of treasures so inestimable and so unique ; scarcely could he summon resolution enough to permit them to leave his hands even for a moment.

"O Lady ! " he cried, "these are veritably priceless things, surpassing in worth the treasures of all kings. This, indeed, is the handwriting of those great masters who sang five hundred years before our birth. How marvellously it has been preserved ! Is not this the wondrous ink of which it was written : 'After centuries I remain firm as stone, and the letters that I make like lacquer' ? And how divine the charm of this composition !—the song of Kao-pien, prince of poets, and Governor of Sze-tchouen five hundred years ago !"

"Kao-pien ! darling Kao-pien ! " murmured Sië, with a singular light in her eyes. "Kao-pien is also my favourite. Dear Ming-Y, let us chant his verses together, to the melody of old—the music of those grand years when men were nobler and wiser than to-day."

And their voices rose through the perfumed night like the voices of the wonder-birds—of the Fung-hoang—blending together in liquid sweetness. Yet a moment, and Ming-Y, overcome by the witchery of his companion's voice,

could only listen in speechless ecstasy, while the lights of the chamber swam dim before his sight, and tears of pleasure trickled down his cheeks.

So the ninth hour passed ; and they continued to converse, and to drink the cool purple wine, and to sing the songs of the years of Thang, until far into the night. More than once Ming-Y thought of departing ; but each time Sië would begin, in that silver-sweet voice of hers, so wondrous a story of the great poets of the past, and of the women whom they loved, that he became as one entranced ; or she would sing for him a song so strange that all his senses seemed to die except that of hearing. And at last, as she paused to pledge him in a cup of wine, Ming-Y could not restrain himself from putting his arm about her round neck and drawing her dainty head close to him, and kissing the lips that were so much ruddier than the wine. Then their lips separated no more ; the night grew old, and they knew it not.

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The birds awakened, the flowers opened their eyes to the rising sun, and Ming-Y found himself at last compelled to bid his lovely enchantress farewell. Sië, accompanying him to the terrace, kissed him fondly and said, " Dear boy, come hither as often as you are able—as often as your heart whispers you to come. I know you are not of those without faith and truth, who betray secrets ; yet, being so young, you might also be sometimes thoughtless ; and I pray you never to forget that only the stars have been the witness of our love. Speak of it to no living person, dearest ; and take with you this little souvenir of our happy night."

And she presented him with an exquisite and curious little thing—a paper-weight in likeness of a couchant lion, wrought from a jade-stone yellow as that created by a rainbow in honour of Kong-fu-tze. Tenderly the boy kissed the gift and the beautiful hand that gave it. " May the spirits punish me," he vowed, " if ever I knowingly give you cause to reproach me, sweetheart ! " And they separated with mutual vows.

That morning, on returning to the house of Lord Tchang, Ming-Y told the first falsehood which had ever passed his lips.

He averred that his mother had requested him thenceforward to pass his nights at home, now that the weather had become so pleasant; for, though the way was somewhat long, he was strong and active, and needed both air and healthy exercise. Tchang believed all Ming-Y said, and offered no objection. Accordingly the lad found himself enabled to pass all his evenings at the house of the beautiful Sië. Each night they devoted to the same pleasures which had made their first acquaintance so charming: they sang and conversed by turns; they played at chess—the learned game invented by Wu-Wang, which is an imitation of war; they composed pieces of eighty rhymes upon the flowers, the trees, the clouds, the streams, the birds, the bees. But in all accomplishments Sië far excelled her young sweetheart. Whenever they played at chess, it was always Ming-Y's general, Ming-Y's *tsiang*, who was surrounded and vanquished; when they composed verses, Sië's poems were ever superior to his in harmony of word-colouring, in elegance of form, in classic loftiness of thought. And the themes they selected were always the most difficult—those of the poets of the Thang dynasty; the songs they sang were also the songs of five hundred years before—the songs of Youen-tchin, of Thou-mou, of Kao-pien above all, high poet and ruler of the province of Sze-tchouen.

So the summer waxed and waned upon their love, and the luminous autumn came, with its vapours of phantom gold, its shadows of magical purple.

Then it unexpectedly happened that the father of Ming-Y, meeting his son's employer at Tching-tou, was asked by him: "Why must your boy continue to travel every evening to the city, now that the winter is approaching? The way is long, and when he returns in the morning he looks foredone with weariness. Why not permit him to slumber in my house during the season of snow?" And the father of Ming-Y, greatly astonished, responded: "Sir, my son has not visited the city, nor has he been to our house all this summer. I fear that he must have acquired wicked habits, and that he passes his nights in evil company—perhaps in gaming, or in drinking with the women of the flower-boats." But the High Commissioner returned:

"Nay! that is not to be thought of. I have never found

any evil in the boy, and there are no taverns nor flower-boats nor any places of dissipation in our neighbourhood. No doubt Ming-Y has found some amiable youth of his own age with whom to spend his evenings, and only told me an untruth for fear that I would not otherwise permit him to leave my residence. I beg that you will say nothing to him until I shall have sought to discover this mystery; and this very evening I shall send my servant to follow after him, and to watch wither he goes."

Pelou readily assented to this proposal, and promising to visit Tchang the following morning, returned to his home. In the evening, when Ming-Y left the house of Tchang, a servant followed him unobserved at a distance. But on reaching the most obscure portion of the road the boy disappeared from sight as suddenly as though the earth had swallowed him. After having long sought him in vain, the domestic returned in great bewilderment to the house, and related what had taken place. Tchang immediately sent a messenger to Pelou.

In the meantime Ming-Y, entering the chamber of his beloved, was surprised and deeply pained to find her in tears. "Sweetheart," she sobbed, wreathing her arms around his neck, "we are about to be separated for ever, because of reasons which I cannot tell you. From the very first I knew this must come to pass, and nevertheless it seemed to me for the moment so cruelly sudden a loss, so unexpected a misfortune that I could not prevent myself from weeping! After this night we shall never see each other again, beloved, and I know that you will not be able to forget me while you live; but I know also that you will become a great scholar, and that honours and riches will be showered upon you, and that some beautiful and loving woman will console you for my loss. And now let us speak no more of grief; but let us pass this last evening joyously, so that your recollection of me may not be a painful one, and that you may remember my laughter rather than my tears."

She brushed the bright drops away, and brought wine and music and the melodious *kin* of seven silken strings, and would not suffer Ming-Y to speak for one moment of the coming separation. And she sang him an ancient song about the calmness of summer lakes reflecting the blue of heaven only, and the calmness of the heart also, before the clouds

of care and of grief and of weariness darken its little world. Soon they forgot their sorrow in the joy of song and wine; and those last hours seemed to Ming-Y more celestial than even the hours of their first bliss.

But when the yellow beauty of morning came their sadness returned, and they wept. Once more Sië accompanied her lover to the terrace steps; and as she kissed him farewell, she pressed into his hand a parting gift—a little brush-case of agate, wonderfully chiselled, and worthy the table of a great poet. And they separated for ever, shedding many tears.

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Still, Ming-Y could not believe it was an eternal parting. "No!" he thought. "I shall visit her to-morrow; for I cannot live without her, and I feel assured that she cannot refuse to receive me." Such were the thoughts that filled his mind as he reached the house of Tchang, to find his father and his patron standing on the porch awaiting him. Ere he could speak a word, Pelou demanded:

"Son, in what place have you been passing your nights?"

Seeing that his falsehood had been discovered, Ming-Y dared not make any reply and remained abashed and silent, with bowed head, in the presence of his father. Then Pelou, striking the boy violently with his staff, commanded him to divulge the secret; and at last, partly through fear of his parent and partly through fear of the law, which ordains that "*the son refusing to obey his father shall be punished with one hundred blows of the bamboo,*" Ming-Y faltered out the history of his love.

Tchang changed colour at the boy's tale. "Child," exclaimed the High Commissioner, "I have no relative of the name of Ping; I have never heard of the woman you describe; I have never heard even of the house which you speak of. But I know also that you cannot dare to lie to Pelou, your honoured father: there is some strange delusion in all this affair."

Then Ming-Y produced the gifts that Sië had given him—the lion of yellow jade, the brush-case of carven agate, also some original compositions made by the beautiful lady herself. The astonishment of Tchang was now shared by Pelou. Both observed that the brush-case of agate and the

lion of jade bore the appearance of objects that had lain buried in the earth for centuries and were of a workmanship beyond the power of living man to imitate; while the compositions proved to be veritable masterpieces of poetry, written in the style of the poets of the dynasty of Thang.

"Friend Pelou," cried the High Commissioner, "let us immediately accompany the boy to the place where he obtained these miraculous things and apply the testimony of our senses to this mystery; the boy is no doubt telling the truth; yet his story passes my understanding." And all three proceeded toward the place of the habitation of Sië.

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But when they had arrived at the shadiest part of the road where the perfumes were most sweet and the mosses were greenest, and the fruits of the wild peach flushed most pinkly, Ming-Y, gazing through the groves, uttered a cry of dismay. Where the azure-tiled roof had risen against the sky there was now only the blue emptiness of air; where the green and-gold façade had been, there was visible only the flickering of leaves under the aureate autumn light; and where the broad terrace had extended could be discerned only a ruin—a tomb so ancient, so deeply gnawed by moss, that the name graven upon it was no longer decipherable. The home of Sië had disappeared.

All suddenly the High Commissioner smote his forehead with his hand, and turning to Pelou recited the well-known verse of the ancient poet, Tching-Kou:

"Surely the peach-flowers blossom over the tomb of Sië-Thao."

"Friend Pelou," continued Tchang, "the beauty who bewitched your son was no other than she whose tomb stands there in ruin before us! Did she not say she was wedded to Ping-Khang? There is no family of that name, but Ping-Khang is indeed the name of a broad alley in the city near. There was a dark riddle in all that she said. She called herself Sië of Moun-Hiao; there is no person of that name, there is no street of that name; but the Chinese characters *Moun* and *Hiao*, placed together, form the character, 'Kiao.' Listen! The alley Ping-Khang, situated in the street Kiao, was the place where dwelt the great courtesans of the dynasty of Thang! Did she not sing the songs of Kao-pien? And upon the brush-case and the paper-weight she gave

your son, are there not characters which read '*Pure object of art belonging to Kao, of the city of Pho-hai*'? That city no longer exists; but the memory of Kao-pien remains, for he was governor of the province of Sze-tchouen, and a mighty poet. And when he dwelt in the land of Chou, was not his favourite the beautiful wanton Sié—Sië-Thao, unmatched for grace among all the women of her day. It was he who made her a gift of those manuscripts of song; it was he who gave her those objects of rare art. Sië-Thao died not as other women die. Her limbs may have crumbled to dust; yet something of her still lives in this deep wood, her shadow still haunts this shawowy place."

Tchang ceased to speak. A vague fear fell upon the three. The thin mists of the morning made dim the distances of green, and deepened the ghostly beauty of the woods. A faint breeze passed by, leaving a trail of blossom-scent—a last odour of dying flowers—thin as that which clings to the silk of a forgotten robe; and as it passed the trees seemed to whisper across the silence, "*Sië-Thao.*"

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Fearing greatly for his son, Pelou sent the lad away at once to the city of Kwang-tchau-fu. And there in after years Ming-Y obtained high dignities and honours by reason of his talents and his learning: and he married the daughter of an illustrious house, by whom he became the father of sons and daughters famous for their virtues and their accomplishments. Never could he forget Sië-Thao; and yet it is said that he never spoke of her—not even to his children when they begged him to tell them the story of two beautiful objects that always lay upon his writing-table: a lion of yellow jade and a brush-case of carven agate.

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SELWYN JEPSON

Nor the Jury

NOR THE JURY

THE baronet helped himself to marmalade.

"Well, what do you think of *that*, cousin of mine?"

Gordon Jaynes read the letter carefully.

"I shouldn't care to have received it myself," he said.

"But, then, I'm not a millionaire. I dare say you get used to that kind of thing."

In his voice there was none of the bitterness that was in his heart. He felt that bitterness whenever the wealth of Sir Robert Jaynes obtruded itself to remind him of his own insolvency. He handed back the threatening letter and stared gloomily out of the long window at the wide Langley lawns. They were gracious in the autumn sun.

"If every man who promised to kill me," said Sir Robert, "kept his promise, I would die several times a year. Naturally, I have enemies. There isn't a rich man who hasn't. The mere fact of his being rich is sufficient reason for quite a number of people to want to put him out of the world."

He laughed easily, and, crumpling the sheet of notepaper in his strong hand, he flicked it into the fire.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "I'll pay off that man for you, Gordon. I said last night that I wouldn't, but I'm damned if I can sit around and see your long face."

Gordon Jaynes turned quickly.

"You will?" he cried, inexpressibly relieved.

The baronet nodded and smiled.

"You're my only relative and heir, and I suppose I'm responsible for you. I'll give you a cheque after breakfast. How much was it—with the interest?"

"Twelve thousand."

"All right. But you've got to give me your word that you'll cut out this racketsy life. These expensive women and so on. It's not good enough, Gordon, old man, you

know it isn't—and there's always a money-lender waiting for men like you—men with prospects."

Gordon Jaynes examined his buttered toast. He resented the dissertation on morals that always accompanied these debt-paying incidents, but he would have to sit through it. He reflected that as a "prospect" Robert was a failure; the man at fifty-two was young with half an energetic lifetime in front of him.

"... but this is definitely the last time I shall help you, Gordon," he was saying. "You have got to learn to stand on your own feet."

His tone was firm but kindly. He did not find it comfortable to talk to a man, a friend and cousin, like that.

Gordon Jaynes made a vague gesture of assent. Half a lifetime in front of the man... unless one of those letter-writers kept a promise.

At that moment the idea of killing the millionaire came to him.

He regarded it calmly, with no sense of horror, while Robert changed the subject with the air of a man who has successfully discharged an unpleasant duty. Gordon Jaynes, however, did not notice it. He was fascinated by the idea of a dead Robert.

Dead: out of the world... with the law of inheritance.

Even when the estate duties were paid there would still be well over a million for his heir to play with; to enable him to gratify the expensive tastes which so far had been his only possessions.

The risks of murder need not trouble an intelligent man. Motive? As far as he was concerned the payment of that £12,000 debt would remove the possibility of his guilt. Would the police seek to fasten the crime on the man who had just been so generously helped by the victim?

Besides, there were the threatening letters, several a year. Why look farther for the murderer than in the author of one of them?

Everything conspired to make the project feasible.

He finished the buttered toast.

"Must you return to town to-night?" Robert asked.
"I am going to pick up a few partridges to-morrow over at

Stourey, if you would care to come along. Just ourselves."

Gordon Jaynes hesitated just a fraction of a second. The invitation suggested a remarkable opportunity. Shooting accidents occurred sometimes. . . . It would be so easy. But there would be people to hint at things. No; he decided to rely on the anonymous letter-writer and the £12,000's worth of rescue.

"I should have liked that," he said, regretfully; "but I must get back."

After dinner Sir Robert wrote the cheque, and Gordon Jaynes posted it. A thought struck him. If Robert died before that cheque was cleared payment of it would be automatically stopped. Anybody but a fool would wait a day or so before he committed the murder.

He would be that fool, and dispel the last shred of possible suspicion.

He shook hands cordially with the baronet under the observant eyes of Terrington, the butler, climbed into the car, and was driven the two miles to the station in time to catch the seven forty-eight, the express which did not stop before reaching Euston.

To the porter who put him into an empty first class compartment he gave a florin that he might, in case of need, be easily remembered, and settled himself down for the three hours' journey.

The moment the train was out of the station, however, he took his suitcase from the rack and moved closer to the door. The town of Langlely lay in a valley, out of which the railway track climbed by a steep gradient through a cutting in the hills. The engine, with no distance in which to gain speed, would labour considerably before reaching the top.

He waited for this, and when the high walls of chalk came glimmering in the light of the carriages he turned the handle of the door. As the train came to the stiffest part of the gradient he threw out the suitcase, stood on the step a moment, judging the drop, and then jumped.

The momentum flung him off his feet, and he lay still until the train had passed and thick darkness enveloped him.

He rose, rubbed his knee, and walked down the cutting, groping for the suitcase. He found it, and sighed with relief. One of the most difficult stages of his plan had been accomplished, and he paused for a moment to listen to the remote song of the train as it gathered speed again on the down-grade for its sixty-miles-an-hour run to London.

The train was his alibi. No one at Euston could ever swear, in the unlikely event of questions being asked, that he, one passenger in several hundreds, had not passed through the barrier.

He left the track at the Langley end of the cutting and crossed a field. In the corner he found a gate and a footpath, along which he made his way quickly in spite of the dark. Years ago, as a boy on holiday from school, he had explored this countryside, and to those early memories he entrusted the task of guiding him to Langley Court.

He knew that he had about six miles to go and that he must cover that distance inside two and a half hours if he was to arrive at the house before Robert retired for the night. He must walk as fast as the ground would permit and keep to the shortest route.

The weight of the suitcase began to trouble him, but he did not make the mistake of trying to hide it. He hurried as best he could and paused but once, and then only when he remembered his railway ticket. He tore it into minute pieces and buried them under a tree in the wood through which he was passing. He strode on through the murk of the October night with a sense of approaching triumph and success strong upon him.

At a few minutes past ten he crept up one of the library windows on the terrace of Langley Court and pressed himself into the thick ivy which grew round it.

A light burned in the room, and at the sight of it he was greatly relieved. Robert had not yet gone to bed. He put down the suitcase and leaned against the wet ivy leaves to regain breath. He knew that half an hour ago Terrington had asked if there was anything Sir Robert required, had been bidden good-night, and was now in his quarters, leaving his master to retire in his own good time.

The household would not learn until morning that Sir

Robert had not slept in his bed. Until morning no one would go near the library.

Once again Gordon Jaynes relied on his boyhood memory and inserted the point of his penknife between the double doors of the window, which was hidden from the view of anyone sitting in front of the fire by a Queen Anne bureau.

To his surprise, however, the catch was not down, and the window opened noiselessly under pressure of his hand. He put away the penknife and, in the diffused light, looked at his watch. A train left Marlesby Junction, twelve miles away, at 2-15, and he had got to travel to London in it. He could catch it, walking steadily.

He stepped into the room on to the heavy carpet and waited a moment behind the concealing bureau. He held his breath and listened, wondering a little at his coolness. His heart was beating unhurriedly. There was no sound save the occasional creaking of the fire. Robert would be reading.

He moved slowly to the edge of the bureau and looked round it. Robert's bald head showed half an inch above the back of the easy chair in which he always sat.

Gordon Jaynes lifted a gloved hand, took a Spanish dagger from the wall where it hung with other medieval weapons, and began to crawl slowly, with infinite attention to silence, toward the easy chair, moving always in the shadow cast by it from the reading lamp. Even if Robert looked round there was every chance that he would not be seen.

But Sir Robert did not look round. He did not stir. Gordon Jaynes reached the chair and rose slowly from his knees. He stood upright and gripped the dagger tightly. He changed his position slightly, so that he could see his cousin's side and the point on the black velvet smoking-jacket under which the lowest rib lay. Below the rib he would drive the sharp blade.

He marked the spot and poised the dagger . . .

And hesitated.

He leaned forward suddenly and stared at the place where he had been about to strike.

"God," he cried in a thin scream.

The millionaire still did not stir. Gordon Jaynes leaned closer; peered with bulging, terrified eyes.

The hilt of a knife already protruded from beneath that lowest rib.

The next moment his wits returned, and he realised, with a gush of triumph, that what he intended to do had already been accomplished for him. Those millions were his. Robert was dead.

The Spanish dagger was not needed. He became frightened of it and ran to the wall by the bureau, where he hung it to its nail.

An enormous weight seemed to have lifted from his spirit; he could have danced. Better make sure the man was quite dead. Must be with that knife in him. Better take another look.

He went reluctantly back to the chair. Yes. Dead, dead, dead! He stood for a moment looking. Horrible! Better get out of here—Marlesby Junction—long walk——

But he did not walk to Marlesby Junction that night.

During the small moment he was standing by Robert's chair the door of the library opened and Terrington appeared.

"I thought I heard a noise," he began. "Good gracious! *You* here, Mr. Gordon?"

Behind the butler was a footman; a young powerful footman, with good eyesight.

"Sir Robert! *Look!*" he cried, and took possession of Gordon Jaynes's wrist and arm before the unfortunate man could think of an adequate explanation for his presence.

"Good Lord! You don't think *I* did it, do you?" he said angrily, and wished suddenly that Sir Robert had not burnt that threatening letter.

"Well," said the footman, "it's a case for the police. It's them you'll have to convince."

"I'll do that easily enough," retorted Jaynes.

But when it came to the point he found that he could not convince them.

Nor the jury.

E. NESBIT

Man-Size in Marble

MAN-SIZE IN MARBLE

ALTHOUGH every word of this story is as true as despair, I do not expect people to believe it. Nowadays a "rational explanation" is required before belief is possible. Let me, then, at once offer the "rational explanation" which finds most favour among those who have heard the tale of my life's tragedy. It is held that we were "under a delusion," Laura and I, on that 31st of October; and that this supposition places the whole matter on a satisfactory and believable basis. The reader can judge, when he, too, has heard my story, how far this is an "explanation," and in what sense it is "rational." There were three who took part in this: Laura and I and another man. The other man still lives, and can speak to the truth of the least credible part of my story.

I never in my life knew what it was to have as much money as I required to supply the most ordinary needs—good colours, books, and cab-fares—and when we were married we knew quite well that we should only be able to live at all by "strict punctuality and attention to business." I used to paint in those days, and Laura used to write, and we felt sure we could keep the pot at least simmering. Living in town was out of the question, so we went to look for a cottage in the country, which should be at once sanitary and picturesque. So rarely do these two qualities meet in one cottage that our search was for some time quite fruitless. But when we got away from friends and house-agents, on our honeymoon, our wits grew clear again, and we knew a pretty cottage when at last we saw one.

It was at Brenzett—a little village set on a hill over against the southern marshes. We had gone there, from the seaside village where we were staying, to see the church, and two fields from the church we found this cottage. It stood quite

by itself, about two miles from the village. It was a long, low building, with rooms sticking out in unexpected places. There was a bit of stone-work—ivy-covered and moss-grown, just two old rooms, all that was left of a big house that had once stood there—and round this stone-work the house had grown up. Stripped of its roses and jasmine it would have been hideous. As it stood it was charming, and after a brief examination we took it. It was absurdly cheap. There was a jolly old-fashioned garden, with grass paths, and no end of hollyhocks and sunflowers, and big lilies. From the window you could see the marsh-pastures, and beyond them the blue, thin line of the sea.

We got a tall old peasant woman to do for us. Her face and figure were good, though her cooking was of the homeliest; but she understood all about gardening, and told us all the old names of the coppices and cornfields, and the stories of the smugglers and highwaymen, and, better still, of the "things that walked," and of the "sights" which met one in lonely glens of a starlight night. We soon came to leave all the domestic business to Mrs. Dorman, and to use her legends in little magazine stories which brought in the jingling guinea.

We had three months of married happiness, and did not have a single quarrel. One October evening I had been down to smoke a pipe with the doctor—our only neighbour—a pleasant young Irishman. Laura had stayed at home to finish a comic sketch. I left her laughing over her own jokes, and came in to find her a crumpled heap of pale muslin, weeping on the window seat.

"Good heavens, my darling, what's the matter?" I cried, taking her in my arms.

"What is the matter? Do speak."

"It's Mrs. Dorman," she sobbed.

"What has she done?" I inquired, immensely relieved.

"She says she must go before the end of the month, and she says her niece is ill; she's gone down to see her now, but I don't believe that's the reason, because her niece is always ill. I believe someone has been setting her against us. Her manner was so queer——"

"Never mind, Pussy," I said; "whatever you do, don't cry, or I shall have to cry too to keep you in countenance, and then you'll never respect your man again."

"But you see," she went on, "it is really serious, because these village people are so sheepy, and if one won't do a thing you may be quite sure none of the others will. And I shall have to cook the dinners and wash up the hateful greasy plates; and you'll have to carry cans of water about and clean the boots and knives—and we shall never have any time for work or earn any money or anything."

I represented to her that even if we had to perform these duties the day would still present some margin for other toils and recreations. But she refused to see the matter in any but the greyest light.

"I'll speak to Mrs. Dorman when she comes back, and see if I can't come to terms with her," I said. "Perhaps she wants a rise in her screw. It will be all right. Let's walk up to the church."

The church was a large and lonely one, and we loved to go there, especially upon bright nights. The path skirted a wood, cut through it once, and ran along the crest of the hill through two meadows, and round the churchyard wall, over which the old yews loomed in black masses of shadow.

This path, which was partly paved, was called "the bier-walk," for it had long been the way by which the corpses had been carried to burial. The churchyard was richly treed, and was shaded by great elms which stood just outside and stretched their majestic arms in benediction over the happy dead. A large, low porch let one into the building by a Norman doorway and a heavy oak door studded with iron. Inside, the arches rose into darkness, and between them the reticulated windows, which stood out white in the moonlight. In the chancel, the windows were of rich glass, which showed in faint light their noble colouring, and made the black oak of the choir pews hardly more solid than the shadows. But on each side of the altar lay a grey marble figure of a knight in full plate armour lying upon a low slab, with hands held up in everlasting prayer, and these figures, oddly enough, were always to be seen if there was any glimmer of light in the church. Their names were lost, but the peasants told of them that they had been fierce and wicked men, marauders by land and sea, who had been the scourge of their time, and had been guilty of deeds so foul that the house they had lived in—the big house, by the way, that had stood on the site of our cottage—had been stricken by lightning and the vengeance of

Heaven. But for all that, the gold of their heirs had bought them a place in the church. Looking at the bad, hard faces reproduced in the marble, this story was easily believed.

The church looked at its best and weirdest on that night, for the shadows of the yew trees fell through the windows upon the floor of the nave and touched the pillars with tattered shade. We sat down together without speaking, and watched the solemn beauty of the old church with some of that awe which inspired its early builders. We walked to the chancel and looked at the sleeping warriors. Then we rested some time on the stone seat in the porch, looking out over the stretch of quiet moonlit meadows, feeling in every fibre of our being the peace of the night and of our happy love; and came away at last with a sense that even scrubbing and black-leading were but small troubles at their worst.

Mrs. Dorman had come back from the village, and I at once invited her to a tête-à-tête.

"Now, Mrs. Dorman," I said, when I had got her into my painting room, "what's all this about your not staying with us?"

"I should be glad to get away, sir, before the end of the month," she answered, with her usual placid dignity.

"Have you any fault to find, Mrs. Dorman?"

"None at all, sir: you and your lady have always been most kind, I'm sure——"

"Well, what is it? Are your wages not high enough?"

"No, sir, I gets quite enough."

"Then why not stay?"

"I'd rather not"—with some hesitation—"my niece is ill."

"But your niece has been ill ever since we came. Can't you stay for another month?"

"No, sir, I'm bound to go by Thursday."

And this was Monday!

"Well, I must say, I think you might have let us know before. There's no time now to get anyone else, and your mistress is not fit to do heavy housework. Can't you stay till next week?"

"I might be able to come back next week."

"But why must you go this week?" I persisted. "Come, out with it."

Mrs. Dorman drew the little shawl, which she always wore,

tightly across her bosom, as though she were cold. Then she said, with a sort of effort :

"They say, sir, as this was a big house in Catholic times, and there was a many deeds done here."

The nature of the "deeds" might be vaguely inferred from the inflection of Mrs. Dorman's voice—which was enough to make one's blood run cold. I was glad that Laura was not in the room. She was always nervous, as highly-strung natures are, and I felt that these tales about our house, told by this old peasant woman, with her impressive manner and contagious credulity, might have made our home less dear to my wife.

"Tell me all about it, Mrs. Dorman," I said; "you needn't mind about telling me. I'm not like the young people who make fun of such things."

Which was partly true.

"Well, sir"—she sank her voice—"you may have seen in the church, beside the altar, two shapes."

"You mean the effigies of the knights in armour," I said cheerfully.

"I mean them two bodies, drew out man-size in marble," she returned, and I had to admit that her description was a thousand times more graphic than mine, to say nothing of a certain weird force and uncanniness about the phrase "drew out man-size in marble."

"They do say, as on All Saints' Eve them two bodies sits up on their slabs, and gets off of them, and then walks down the aisle, *in their marble*"—(another good phrase, Mrs. Dorman)—"and as the church clock strikes eleven they walks out of the church door, and over the graves, and along the bier-walk, and if it's a wet night there's the marks of their feet in the morning."

"And where do they go?" I asked, rather fascinated.

"They comes back here to their home, sir, and if anyone meets them——"

"Well, what then?" I asked.

But no—not another word could I get from her, save that her niece was ill and she must go.

"Whatever you do, sir, lock the door early on All Saints' Eve, and make the cross-sign over the doorstep and on the windows."

"But has anyone ever seen these things?" I persisted.

"Who was here last year?"

"No one, sir; the lady as owned the house only stayed here in summer, and she always went to London a full month afore *the* night." And I'm sorry to inconvenience you and your lady, but my niece is ill and I must go on Thursday."

I could have shaken her for her absurd reiteration of that obvious fiction, after she had told me her real reasons.

I did not tell Laura the legend of the shapes that "walked in their marble," partly because a legend concerning our house might perhaps trouble my wife, and partly, I think, from some more occult reason. This was not quite the same to me as any other story, and I did not want to talk about it till the day was over. I had very soon ceased to think of the legend, however. I was painting a portrait of Laura, against the lattice window, and I could not think of much else. I had got a splendid background of yellow and grey sunset, and was working away with enthusiasm at her face. On Thursday Mrs. Dorman went. She relented, at parting, so far as to say:

"Don't you put yourself about too much, ma'am, and if there's any little thing I can do next week I'm sure I shan't mind."

Thursday passed off pretty well. Friday came. It is about what happened on that Friday that this is written.

I got up early, I remember, and lighted the kitchen fire, and had just achieved a smoky success when my little wife came running down as sunny and sweet as the clear October morning itself. We prepared breakfast together, and found it very good fun. The housework was soon done, and when brushes and brooms and pails were quiet again the house was still indeed. It is wonderful what a difference one makes in a house. We really missed Mrs. Dorman, quite apart from considerations concerning pots and pans. We spent the day in dusting our books and putting them straight, and dined gaily on cold steak and coffee. Laura was, if possible, brighter and gayer and sweeter than usual, and I began to think that a little domestic toil was really good for her. We had never been so merry since we were married, and the walk we had that afternoon was, I think, the happiest time of all my life. When we had watched the deep scarlet clouds slowly pale into leaden grey against a pale green sky and saw the white mists curl up along the hedgerows in the distant marsh we came back to the house hand in hand.

"You are sad, my darling," I said, half-jestingly, as we sat down together in our little parlour. I expected a disclaimer, for my own silence had been the silence of complete happiness. To my surprise she said :

"Yes, I think I am sad, or, rather, I am uneasy. I don't think I'm very well. I have shivered three or four times since we came in ; and it is not cold, is it ? "

"No," I said, and hoped it was not a chill caught from the treacherous mists that roll up from the marshes in the dying night. No—she said, she did not think so. Then, after a silence, she spoke suddenly :

"Do you ever have presentiments of evil ? "

"No," I said, smiling, "and I shouldn't believe in them if I had."

"I do," she went on ; "the night my father died I knew it, though he was right away in the North of Scotland." I did not answer in words.

She sat looking at the fire for some time in silence, gently stroking my hand. At last she sprang up, came behind me, and, drawing my head back, kissed me.

"There, it's over now," she said. "What a baby I am ! Come, light the candles, and we'll have some of these new Rubinstein duets."

And we spent a happy hour or two at the piano.

At about half-past ten I began to long for the good-night pipe, but Laura looked so white that I felt it would be brutal of me to fill our sitting-room with the fumes of strong cavendish.

"I'll take my pipe outside," I said.

"Let me come, too."

"No, sweetheart, not to-night ; you're much too tired. I shan't be long. Get to bed, or I shall have an invalid to nurse to-morrow as well as the boots to clean."

I kissed her and was turning to go when she flung her arms round my neck and held me as if she would never let me go again. I stroked her hair.

"Come, Pussy, you're over-tired. The housework has been too much for you."

She loosened her clasp a little and drew a deep breath.

"No. We've been very happy to-day, Jack, haven't we ? Don't stay out too long."

"I won't, my dearie."

I strolled out of the front door, leaving it unlatched. What a night it was! The jagged masses of heavy dark cloud were rolling at intervals from horizon to horizon, and thin white wreaths covered the stars. Through all the rush of the cloud river the moon swam, breasting the waves and disappearing again in the darkness.

I walked up and down, drinking in the beauty of the quiet earth and the changing sky. The night was absolutely silent. Nothing seemed to be abroad. There was no skurrying of rabbits, or twitter of the half-asleep birds. And though the clouds went sailing across the sky, the wind that drove them never came low enough to rustle the dead leaves in the woodland paths. Across the meadows I could see the church tower standing out black and grey against the sky. I walked there thinking over our three months of happiness.

I heard a bell-beat from the church. Eleven already! I turned to go in, but the night held me. I could not go back into our little warm rooms yet. I would go up to the church.

I looked in at the low window as I went by. Laura was half-lying on her chair in front of the fire. I could not see her face, only her little head showed dark against the pale blue wall. She was quite still. Asleep, no doubt.

I walked slowly along the edge of the wood. A sound broke the stillness of the night, it was a rustling in the wood. I stopped and listened. The sound stopped too. I went on, and now distinctly heard another step than mine answer mine like an echo. It was a poacher or a wood-stealer, most likely, for these were not unknown in our Arcadian neighbourhood. But whoever it was, he was a fool not to step more lightly. I turned into the wood and now the footstep seemed to come from the path I had just left. It must be an echo, I thought. The wood looked perfect in the moonlight. The large dying ferns and the brushwood showed where through thinning foliage the pale light came down. The tree trunks stood up like Gothic columns all around me. They reminded me of the church, and I turned into the bier-walk, and passed through the corpse-gate between the graves to the low porch.

I paused for a moment on the stone seat where Laura and I had watched the fading landscape. Then I noticed that the door of the church was open, and I blamed myself for having left it unlatched the other night. We were the only people who ever cared to come to the church except on Sundays, and

I was vexed to think that through our carelessness the damp autumnal airs had had a chance of getting in and injuring the old fabric. I went in. It will seem strange, perhaps, that I should have gone half-way up the aisle before I remembered—with a sudden chill, followed by as sudden a rush of self-contempt—that this was the very day and hour when, according to tradition, the “shapes drew out man-size in marble” began to walk.

Having thus remembered the legend, and remembered it with a shiver, of which I was ashamed, I could not do otherwise than walk up towards the altar, just to look at the figures—as I said to myself; really what I wanted was to assure myself, first, that I did not believe the legend, and, secondly, that it was not true. I was rather glad that I had come. I thought now I could tell Mrs. Dorman how vain her fancies were, and how peacefully the marble figures slept on through the ghastly hour. With my hands in my pockets I passed up the aisle. In the grey dim light the eastern end of the church looked larger than usual, and the arches above the two tombs looked larger too. The moon came out and showed me the reason. I stopped short, my heart gave a leap that nearly choked me, and then sank sickeningly.

The “bodies drew out man-size” *were gone!* and their marble slabs lay wide and bare in the vague moonlight that slanted through the east window.

Were they really gone, or was I mad? Clenching my nerves, I stooped and passed my hand over the smooth slabs, and felt their flat unbroken surface. Had someone taken the things away? Was it some vile practical joke? I would make sure, anyway. In an instant I had made a torch of a newspaper, which happened to be in my pocket, and, lighting it, held it high above my head. Its yellow glare illumined the dark arches and those slabs. The figures *were* gone. And I was alone in the church; or was I alone?

And then a horror seized me, a horror indefinable and indescribable—an overwhelming certainty of supreme and accomplished calamity. I flung down the torch and tore along the aisle and out through the porch, biting my lips as I ran to keep myself from shrieking aloud. Oh, was I mad—or what was this that possessed me? I leaped the churchyard wall and took the straight cut across the fields, led by the light from our windows.

Just as I got over the first stile a dark figure seemed to spring out of the ground. Mad still with that certainty of misfortune, I made for the thing that stood in my path, shouting, "Get out of the way, can't you!"

But my push met with a more vigorous resistance than I had expected. My arms were caught just above the elbow and held as in a vice, and the raw-boned Irish doctor actually shook me.

"Let me go, you fool," I gasped. "The marble figures have gone from the church; I tell you they've gone."

He broke into a ringing laugh. "I'll have to give ye a draught to-morrow, I see. Ye've bin smoking too much and listening to old wives' tales."

"I tell you, I've seen the bare slabs."

"Well, come back with me. I'm going up to old Palmer's—his daughter's ill; we'll look in at the church and let me see the bare slabs."

"You go, if you like," I said, a little less frantic for his laughter; "I'm going home to my wife."

"Rubbish, man," said he; "d'ye think I'll permit of that? Are ye to go saying all yer life that ye've seen solid marble endowed with vitality, and me to go all me life saying ye were a coward? No, sir—ye shan't do ut."

The night air—a human voice—and I think also the physical contact with this six feet of solid common sense, brought me back a little to my ordinary self, and the word "coward" was a mental shower-bath.

"Come on, then," I said sullenly; "perhaps you're right."

He still held my arm tightly. We got over the stile and back to the church. All was still as death. The place smelt very damp and earthly. We walked up the aisle. I am not ashamed to confess that I shut my eyes: I knew the figures would not be there. I heard Kelly strike a match.

"Here they are, ye see, right enough; ye've been dreaming or drinking, asking yer pardon for the imputation."

I opened my eyes. By Kelly's expiring vesta I saw two shapes lying "in their marble" on their slabs. I drew a deep breath.

"I'm awfully indebted to you," I said. "It must have been some trick of light, or I have been working rather hard, perhaps that's it. I was quite convinced they were gone."

"I'm aware of that," he answered rather grimly; "ye'll

have to be careful of that brain of yours, my friend, I assure ye."

He was leaning over and looking at the right-hand figure, whose stony face was the most villainous and deadly in expression.

"By Jove," he said, "something has been afoot here—this hand is broken."

And so it was. I was certain that it had been perfect the last time Laura and I had been there.

"Perhaps someone has *tried* to remove them," said the young doctor.

"Come along," I said, "or my wife will be getting anxious. You'll come in and have a drop of whisky and drink confusion to ghosts and better sense to me."

"I ought to go up to Palmer's, but it's so late now I'd best leave it till the morning," he replied.

I think he fancied I needed him more than did Palmer's girl, so, discussing how such an illusion could have been possible, and deducing from this experience large generalities concerning ghostly apparitions, we walked up to our cottage. We saw, as we walked up the garden path, that bright light streamed out of the front door, and presently saw that the parlour door was open, too. Had she gone out?

"Come in," I said, and Dr. Kelly followed me into the parlour. It was all ablaze with candles, not only the wax ones, but at least a dozen guttering, glaring tallow dips, stuck in vases and ornaments in unlikely places. Light, I knew, was Laura's remedy for nervousness. Poor child! Why had I left her? Brute that I was.

We glanced round the room, and at first we did not see her. The window was open, and the draught set all the candles flaring one way. Her chair was empty and her handkerchief and book lay on the floor. I turned to the window. There, in the recess of the window, I saw her. Oh, my child, my love, had she gone to that window to watch for me? And what had come into the room behind her? To what had she turned with that look of frantic fear and horror? Oh, my little one, had she thought that it was I whose step she heard, and turned to meet—what?

She had fallen back across a table in the window, and her body lay half on it and half on the window-seat, and her head hung down over the table, the brown hair loosened and fallen

to the carpet. Her lips were drawn back, and her eyes wide, wide open. They saw nothing now. What had they seen last?

The doctor moved towards her, but I pushed him aside and sprang to her; caught her in my arms and cried:

"It's all right, Laura! I've got you safe, wife."

She fell into my arms in a heap. I clasped her and kissed her, and called her by all her pet names, but I think I knew all the time that she was dead. Her hands were tightly clenched. In one of them she held something fast. When I was quite sure that she was dead, and that nothing mattered at all any more, I let him open her hand to see what she held.

It was a grey marble finger.

JOHN METCALFE

The Tunnel

The Bad Lands

THE TUNNEL

WITH an unspoken curse Pietro Succi gave his head a downward, peck-like jerk, twisted his shoulder round and bit his upper arm. The fit of coughing which he stifled in his sleeve convulsed his frame, passed, then returned more violently. And each time that he coughed Pietro bit.

At last the paroxysm left him. He raised his head and with a cautious venom spat out the earth which filled his mouth, gritted between his teeth. His body was damp with sweat. He was weak and panting from strenuous exertion and from his smothered rage against the cough which nearly had betrayed him.

The narrow tunnel at one end of which he crouched was perhaps twelve yards long, but Succi reckoned it in years. Two yards a year, that made six years. That was the time it took a man to burrow downwards through the earthen flooring of his cell, to drive a level passage underneath the prison wall, to start at last with feverish hands and wildly beating heart upon the upward trending slope that led towards freedom and the light of day.

Humped half-asquat within the elbow of this gradual ascent, Succi could catch the glimmer of the lamp that shone all night outside his cell. The light had to pass through the grating over his door, to filter downwards through the boards that screened the opening of his burrow, to struggle finally along the horizontal passage. Yet by this niggard radiance Succi could see as plainly as most men in the daylight. He could see the knots in the boards which he had used to revet the sides of his tunnel, could even see the blood that dulled the glitter of the nail upon a lacerated finger. He had developed the eyes of a bat or of a mole.

With a curious illusion of remoteness the shadowy vista of his burrow stretched in a dwindling ring towards the grudging trickle of the light, but closer, at a little further

than his hand might reach, the upper portion of its circle was occluded by a straight, black edge. That was the bottom of the prison wall, he thought. He looked at it and frowned.

Even now, with liberty, fresh air, a bare two yards maybe above his head, the thing dismayed and baffled him. Hardly a board that stayed the tunnel's sides of which he should not know the form and feel by heart, hardly a scar upon the stubborn soil to which he might not give a proper story and a date, yet of the grave miscalculation which had brought him up against the lower courses of the wall instead of several feet beneath it he could remember nothing. It must have added at the least a fortnight to his tale of strenuous days, for it entailed an awkward dip and, till he worked beyond it, a painful cramping of the limbs. Strange that he should have so forgotten! For some moments he regarded it perplexedly, then with a sudden passionate intake of the breath he turned. Enough that it was passed. Another hour and he should be free. Feverishly he recommenced his labouring.

He was still panting from excitement and from the violence of his toil. The sweat which had chilled upon his body made him shiver till his renewed exertion warmed him once again. He worked with both hands clasped about the handle of a chisel, prising and clawing, using his fingers to tear out the loosened clods. The earth fell pattering round him in a chilly, softly crumbling shower, matting his hair, tickling inside his loosely fitting shirt, filling his eyes and nose, making him choke and grunt. Once, in a frozen rage, he stopped again to clap his mouth against his sleeve, fearing a fresh attack of coughing, but presently the irritation passed and he continued. A cough now, he fancied, so short a distance from the surface, might well be heard above. The sound might carry upwards. . . . And then, perhaps, detection and the wrecking of the work of years, a thing for him far worse than death, a thing to crack the heart.

He strove in desperate haste, for he had burned his boats behind him. It was now or never. The work that he should do to-night would, at an earlier stage, have taken him six months. He had calculated matters to a nicety. Now, on the final lap, it was no longer necessary to carry back the earth laboriously to his cell, plaster it evenly upon the floor and cover it with straw. He had merely to let it fall about

him, packing it roughly downwards with his feet. Unless he had seriously under-estimated his distance from the surface there would always be an opening left to breathe by.

The tunnel took increasingly an upward trend. Behind him lay the little pile of boards which he had brought to prop the sides. They were the last the Governor had sent him, the remnants of a packing-case. After the first two years he had been allowed to occupy his time in fashioning as best he might from rude material such as this a host of worthless trifles—brackets and little cabinets, a table even and an ornamental stool. Of what became of them he had no notion, nor was he curious to inquire. They were removed as soon as made, gravely, without comment, but with the suggestion of a stern pity, by the sphinx-like warder who carried him the wood. Enough that they had served his turn, they and the chisel. As for the boards, he would hardly need them now. In half an hour or less the burrow should be vertical, and then . . .

With a tightening at his chest, a curious prickling and tingling of his skin, he realised that at last the time had come, the moment he had longed for, the distant goal of years, the crowning of his days of planning, stolen nights of toil. Already he was actually outside the prison wall, even his toes had passed that fatal boundary. The earth rained round him in a steady and increasing shower. It was much softer to work than he had thought. The going was strangely, unexpectedly easy. For a second he stood puzzled, vaguely disconcerted.

Then, with a bracing of his muscles for the ultimate assault, he began again to battle upwards, and as his body strove and struggled, Pietro's mind, released, fled skimming backwards.

In a kind of vivid dream he saw himself as he had stood eight years ago, desolate for the first time within his cell, gazing with unseeing eyes upon the truckle bed, the freshly littered straw, listening in a dry anguish of despair to the fading echoes of his gaoler's tread.

For an unreckoned time his mind had frozen in a curious suspension of emotion. Within it none the less the feverishly imaged details of his trial had revolved grotesquely.

He came of humble but aspiring stock. At twenty-five he had inherited from his father one of the small quicksilver mines by Veggia. He had married, bought a villa near the coast.* The mine was managed by a Sardinian named Torriani, a bitter, yellow-visaged man, whom gossip credited with a passion for Pietro's wife. One morning Torriani vanished, but a fortnight later his battered body was discovered at the bottom of a disused shaft. Pietro was arrested.

His trial dragged throughout the flaming heat of a Sicilian summer towards a pre-destined end. A thousand nothings had declared his guilt—forgotten jests that turned bewilderingly to subtle threats, the raked-up story of some fatuous, years-old altercation over cards, innumerable significant and sinister mischances. . . . Pietro, calm throughout three torturing months, broke down at last before his lawyer. "But," he had cried, "they don't understand! You see? They don't understand. I'm innocent, I proclaim it, innocent!" The lawyer, shrugging wryly, had with a bitter smile replied: "Ah, well, as it happens you're a lucky one. I can tell you that you've escaped the life term. They're commuting it to forty years." That irony, however, was lost upon Pietro.

Now, as his fingers tore away the over-roofing earth in their exultant fury, he felt a dim amazement for these early days. What had his life been like, how had he lived at all without this hope, this secret and engrossing dream of liberty, to nourish and sustain him?

Quite plainly he recalled the birth of his idea. Two years or more had passed since his conviction and he was busy hoeing a bed of garlic in the Governor's garden. Such jobs were granted in reward for good behaviour. Raising his eyes a moment from his work he had looked up and seen the sunlight glitter on a pane. He had been long enough within the prison to realise that a little further to the rear beneath this pane was situated his own cell. In a flash it had come to him. He could be no more than twenty paces from the outer wall. Some day he would escape!

Reflection, while it brought to light unreckoned difficulties, had strengthened his resolve. A number of circumstances favoured the attempt. For one thing, the wood and mallet and the precious chisel! Besides that, the prison was old

and antiquated. Upon the mainland it could never have existed. It had been extemporised half a century ago from the ruined stronghold of some fallen noble house and served since then for the incarceration of *ladrones* and occasional *banditti* from the hills. His own cell had an earthen floor. . . .

It was in the night that he had worked. At first he had used a nail and after that the taper of the chisel blade which he had pulled from out its wooden socket. The blunting and the rusting of the other end would have aroused suspicion. A hundred pitfalls lay in wait for an unwary step, a hundred far-off chances of detection had had to be envisaged. The smallest things disclosed a lurking menace, the veriest trifle might betray him instantly. Even the cleansing of the chisel-end, still more of his own person, required elaborate thought and preparation. Impossible to use his drinking water; he had had to lick and afterwards to spit.

With the deepening of his burrow fresh obstacles arose. The opening had to be covered with boards and then with straw. It became increasingly an arduous task to free his clothes and body of the soil that covered them. Finally he feigned a liking for lying on the earth to cool himself. His warder, fortunately, was an unsuspicious giant from the plains of Lombardy.

There came one day the rumour of an inspection of the prison. In each cell old straw was to be removed and fresh laid down. Pietro spent a night in the meticulous plastering and levelling of earth upon the boards that hid his tunnel. It was not, however, until week had lengthened into weary week that the inspection finally took place. And meanwhile all his work was at a standstill. The matter cost him full two months' delay.

So through six years of striving, planning, had he toiled on undaunted towards his distant goal. Beneath the semblance of a bowed dejection he had developed an amazing cunning. True, he had made the tunnel, but truer that the tunnel had made him. He had given it of his best, and as requital had acquired courage and enterprise, resource and swift prevision. His wits were tempered danger-sharp.

Of dire necessity he had achieved the very refinement of dissimulation. Amongst his keepers he was held to be a man whose spirit had been broken by his troubles. He had

overheard them once as they discussed him. Their words had made him chuckle. He, broken! He who had wrought a tunnel with the sweat of brain and body, the ungrudging agony of years! He was above them all, the clods, the fat-cheeked, swine-fed dolts! He worked more gleefully that night for knowing how he had outwitted them.

Thus with the steady lengthening of the tunnel a secret and increasing pride had burned within the soul of its creator. Pride—and another and intenser feeling of which the man himself was unaware.

Slowly, unconsciously, the focus of his powers had shifted. The tunnel, from being a means to an end, had grown itself to be an overmastering passion, filling his days and nights, absorbing his whole being. Like a difficult and an ungrateful child it called unceasingly upon his time, his labour and his loving care. His life was dedicated to its service. He was become its creature and its slave.

Once there had been excitement in the prison. A man was pardoned. He had been a convict longer than Pietro—fifteen years. Fresh evidence had come to light and he was free. A miracle! There had been a glimpse of him as he passed unsteadily along a corridor in a grey shirt and trousers, his face vacant, staring. He did not look happy. Liberty had merely dazed, bewildered him. Pietro felt no envy. Not thus to him should freedom come at length. Not as a gift—Pietro should command it!

And now, at last, the time had come, the time towards which his every thought had strained, his every energy been bent. . . . A few more moments and he would have left the tunnel. It would be no longer his. In the midst of his feverish labours a sudden chill passed down his spine, a shudder almost of dismay.

His tunnel! Like the recurring motive of some splendid symphony it had run through his life, informing, unifying. He had served it as an artist served his art, a priest his faith, a worshipper, a devotee. For years on end he had assessed each day by nothing but the handfuls of brown earth he carried backwards to his cell. Those strenuous, troglodytic hours had done their work on him. He was become the slave of one idea, a scheming, resolute brain directing hands that clawed and tore, a man no longer, only a Creature that could Tunnel.

Yet now was not the time to waver, falter. The work which he had carried almost to completion awaited coronation. Success alone would set a seal upon endeavour. To fail was to be false to what his strength and skill had fashioned, to prove unworthy of the masterpiece he had created. Besides, the moments sped. He must be free three hours before sunrise at the least. The nights just now were never very cold. He knew the country well. With any luck he would have gained the forest-covered foot-hills before the dawn had broken. And then, by stealth and fleetness to the Northern coast, running by night, hiding throughout the day. He wondered how his wife would welcome him. He pictured her surprise. . . .

Suddenly he paused. His heart gave a wild beat. A clod, untouched, came tumbling of itself upon his feet. He put a hand upon the place from which it fell. Just for a second the crumbling earth seemed to strike faintly warm upon his finger-tips.

His brain swam. Save for his cramped position in the tunnel he would have fallen. After a while he felt again. The warmth was nothing, only his imagination. Yet no! Placing his fingers on the earth a little lower down he thought he could detect a difference in the temperature. The lower soil was cooler by a shade.

He struggled to collect himself, but as his hand had felt the earth his heart had given a sick drop. He was curiously weak, exhausted, not by his savage toil so much as by some strange and clutching terror, a vague and haunting fear, that sapped his strength and drained his energy. A sense of ominous impendence weighed him down. In vain he tried to grapple with he knew not what. The thing evaded capture like a dream that mocked him.

In the close silence of the tunnel's end he waited, listening, and, as he waited, something crept and stirred minutely in his brain. He could hear the hammering of his heart—it sounded like the beating of a drum. He could hear the drive and surge of blood against his ears, the tiny whispering of the damp and wounded earth about his head. And now between these sounds, a voice, a memory. . . .

His haunting dream had slowly gathered shape. A threatening image rose before his eyes. He saw the bottom of the prison wall, its ruled and level edge, that wall that should

not have been there. He saw himself as he had stood dismayed a moment gone, his hand upon the earth that had seemed warm. He saw at last a vacant, goggling face, the face of someone passing down a corridor, the tautly white and staring face of one whom liberty had terrified. . . .

He turned and in a final frenzy tore wildly at the soil above his head. He struggled, but the presage of some imminent disaster sucked his strength. A foreboding, black as death, had gripped his soul, a baffling, nightmare sense of unreality.

He had dropped the chisel and was working with his hands alone. There were stones now and suddenly the blood ran trickling warm about his fingers. A smother of earth fell blinding, choking, in his eyes and mouth, but still he battled upwards. As from some frightful dream that holds its victim still upon the parting brink of sleep he struggled to awake. Once and again his brain had tottered, bursting, on that fatal verge. . . .

He realised that he was shouting, cursing, but his outcry did not cease. A blind unreasoning fury had possessed him.

Suddenly the earth above him stirred. It fell upon his neck, his shoulders, in a murderous, crushing weight. He gasped for breath. As by degrees he fought his upward way he felt a burning heat. His eyes were blinded by a torturing light. Something was roaring, booming, in his ears. Surely the sound of voices.

And, why, it was broad day !

He sank exhausted, dazed, upon the ground. He rubbed his eyes and, blinking, looked about him. Where was the prison, where ? Whose were those faces peering at him through a fence ?

For a while he sat, bewildered and dismayed, then, as he heard a step behind and felt a touch upon his shoulder, his confusion ended. Of course, he could remember now, remember perfectly. This was his joke, the little joke he played so well. These were the people who had come to watch him and applaud.

The fire left his eyes. His frenzy was replaced by an abashed docility. Upon his grimed and bleeding face there broke the flicker of a wistful smile. A pair of unseen hands assisted him to rise.

He shuffled slowly off, dropping upon that firm and friendly arm. He was weary, weary, and very hungry.

Presently he knew that they would give him supper. His smile attained a preternatural tenderness.

For a short time after he had vanished the little crowd that had collected to watch Pietro Succi's exit from his burrow stood chattering by the fence. It was rare fun to see that shouting, frenzied thing with whirling, flail-like arms come thrashing upwards from the ground. Good fun, and nobody the worse for peeping, although his people did make such a fuss. It was worth ten lire any day to watch. Besides, it only happened about once a month.

After the rest had scattered, two peasant lads remained beside an opening in the fence.

"And now, you see," said one, "that's how he always does it. Just like a badger, isn't he, or else an earth-bear from the forest? They only start the tunnel for him and he finishes. He thinks that he's escaping from the prison. Seven times I've seen it. The greatest sight in Veggia—or anywhere in Sicily they say. Why, once there was a man who came to see him do it from Palermo."

"But why," inquired the other, "why does he want to tunnel? And was he really in a prison once?"

"Yes. He was eight years in the prison. They thought he murdered someone. He was just escaping by his tunnel when they pardoned him. It made him mad. And now he always has to burrow."

For a while they hung fascinated, staring upon the place from which the madman had emerged. Then, with a final shuddering glance, they slowly turned away.

THE BAD LANDS

IT is now perhaps fifteen years ago that Brent Ormerod, seeking the rest and change of scene that should help him to slay the demon neurosis, arrived in Todd towards the close of a mid-October day. A decrepit fly bore him to the one hotel, where his rooms were duly engaged, and it is this vision of himself sitting in the appalling vehicle that makes him think it was October or thereabouts, for he distinctly remembers the determined settling down of the dusk that forced him to drive when he would have preferred to follow his luggage on foot.

He decided immediately that five o'clock was an unsuitable time to arrive in Todd. The atmosphere, as it were, was not receptive. There was a certain repellent quality about the frore autumn air, and something peculiarly shocking in the way in which desultory little winds would spring up in darkening streets to send the fallen leaves scurrying about in hateful, furtive whirlpools.

Dinner, too, at the hotel hardly brought the consolation he had counted on. The meal itself was unexceptionable, and the room cheerful and sufficiently well filled for that time of year, yet one trivial circumstance was enough to send him upstairs with his temper ruffled and his nerves on edge. They had put him to a table with a one-eyed man, and that night the blank eye haunted all his dreams.

But for the first eight or nine days at Todd things went fairly well with him. He took frequent cold baths and regular exercise and made a point of coming back to the hotel so physically tired that to get into bed was usually to drop immediately into sleep. He wrote back to his sister, Joan, at Kensington that his nerves were already much improved and that only another fortnight seemed needed to complete the cure. "Altogether a highly satisfactory week."

Those who have been to Todd remember it as a quiet,

secretive watering-place, couched watchfully in a fold of a long range of low hills along the Norfolk coast. It has been pronounced "restful" by those in high authority, for time there has a way of passing dreamily as if the days, too, were being blown past like the lazy clouds on the wings of wandering breezes. At the back, the look of the land is somehow strangely forbidding, and it is wiser to keep to the shore and the more neighbouring villages. Salterton, for instance, has been found quite safe and normal.

There are long stretches of sand dunes to the west, and by their side a nine-hole golf-course. Here, at the time of Brent's visit, stood an old and crumbling tower, an enigmatic structure which he found interesting from its sheer futility. Behind it an inexplicable road seemed to lead with great decision most uncomfortably to nowhere. . . . Todd, he thought, was in many ways a nice spot, but he detected in it a tendency to grow on one unpleasantly.

He came to this conclusion at the end of the ninth day, for it was then that he became aware of a peculiar uneasiness, an indescribable *malaise*.

This feeling of disquiet he at first found himself quite unable to explain or analyse. His nerves he had thought greatly improved since he had left Kensington, and his general health was good. He decided, however, that perhaps yet more exercise was necessary, and so he walked along the links and the sand dunes to the queer tower and the inexplicable road that lay behind it three times a day instead of twice.

His discomfort rapidly increased. He would become conscious, as he set out for his walk, of a strange sinking at his heart and of a peculiar moral disturbance which was very difficult to describe. These sensations attained their maximum when he had reached his goal upon the dunes, and he suffered then what something seemed to tell him was very near the pangs of spiritual dissolution.

It was on the eleventh day that some faint hint of the meaning of these peculiar symptoms crossed his mind. For the first time he asked himself why it was that of all the many rambles he had taken in Todd since his arrival each one seemed inevitably to bring him to the same place—the yellow sand dunes with the mysterious looking tower in the background. Something in the bland foolishness of

the structure seemed to have magnetised him, and in the unaccountable excitement which the sight of it invariably produced, he had found himself endowing it with almost human characteristics.

With its white nightcap dome and its sides of pale yellow stucco it might seem at one moment to be something extravagantly ridiculous, a figure of fun at which one should laugh and point. Then, as likely as not, its character would change a little, and it would take on the abashed and crest-fallen look of a jester whose best joke has fallen deadly flat, while finally, perhaps, it would develop with startling rapidity into a jovial old gentleman laughing madly at Ormerod from the middle distance out of infinite funds of merriment.

Now Brent was well aware of the dangers of an obsession such as this, and he immediately resolved to rob the tower of its unwholesome fascination by simply walking straight up to it, past it, and onwards along the road that stretched behind it.

It was on the morning of one of the last October days that he set out from the hotel with this intention in his mind. He reached the dunes at about ten, and plodded with some difficulty across them in the direction of the tower. As he neared it his accustomed sensations became painfully apparent, and presently increased to such a pitch that it was all he could do to continue on his way.

He remembered being struck again with the peculiar character of the winding road that stretched before him into a hazy distance where everything seemed to melt and swim in shadowy vagueness. On his left the gate stood open, to his right the grotesque form of the tower threatened. . . .

Now he had reached it, and its shadow fell straight across his path. He did not halt to examine it, but strode forward through the open gate and entered upon the winding road. At the same moment he was astonished to notice that the painful clutch at his heart was immediately lifted, and that with it, too, all the indescribable uneasiness which he had characterised to himself as "moral" had utterly disappeared.

He had walked on for some little distance before another rather remarkable fact struck his attention. The country was no longer vague; rather, it was peculiarly distinct, and he was able to see for long distances over what seemed

considerable stretches of park-like land, grey, indeed, in tone and somehow sad with a most poignant melancholy, yet superficially, at least, well cultivated and in some parts richly timbered. He looked behind him to catch a glimpse of Todd and of the sea, but was surprised to find that in that direction the whole landscape was become astonishingly indistinct and shadowy.

It was not long before the mournful aspect of the country about him began so to depress him and work upon his nerves that he debated with himself the advisability of returning at once to the hotel. He found that the ordinary, insignificant things about him were becoming charged with sinister suggestion and that the scenery on all sides was rapidly developing an unpleasant tendency to the *macabre*. Moreover his watch told him that it was now half-past eleven—and lunch was at one. Almost hastily he turned about and began to descend the winding road.

It was about an hour later that he again reached the tower and saw the familiar dunes stretching once more before him. For some reason or other he seemed to have found the way back much longer and more difficult than the outward journey, and it was with a feeling of distinct relief that he actually passed through the gate and set his face towards Todd.

He did not go out again that afternoon, but sat smoking and thinking in the hotel. In the lounge he spoke to a man who sat in a chair beside him.

"What a queer place that is all at the back there behind the dunes!"

His companion's only comment was a somewhat drowsy grunt.

"Behind the tower," pursued Ormerod, "the funny tower at the other end of the links. The most God-forsaken, dismal place you can imagine. And simply miles of it!"

The other, roused to coherence much against his will, turned slowly round.

"Don't know it," he said. "There's a large farm where you say, and the other side of that is a river, and then you come to Harkaby or somewhere."

He closed his eyes and Ormerod was left to ponder the many difficulties of his remarks.

At dinner he found a more sympathetic listener. Mr.

Stanton-Boyle had been in Todd a week when Brent arrived, and his sensitive, young-old face with the eager eyes and the quick, nervous contraction of the brows had caught the newcomer's attention from the first. Up to now, indeed, they had only exchanged commonplaces, but to-night each seemed more disposed towards intimacy. Ormerod began.

"I suppose you've walked around the country at the back here a good deal?" he said.

"No," replied the other. "I never go there now. I went there once or twice and that was enough."

"Why?"

"Oh, it gets on my nerves, that's all. Do you get any golf here? . . ."

The conversation passed to other subjects, and it was not until both were smoking together over liqueur brandies in the lounge that it returned to the same theme. And then they came to a remarkable conclusion.

"The country at the back of this place," said Brent's companion, "is somehow abominable. It ought to be blown up or something. I don't say it was always like that. Last year, for instance, I don't remember noticing it at all. I fancy it may have been depressing enough, but it was not—not abominable. It's gone abominable since then, particularly to the south-west!"

They said good-night after agreeing to compare notes on Todd, S.W., and Ormerod had a most desolating dream wherein he walked up and up into a strange dim country, full of sighs and whisperings and crowding, sombre trees, where hollow breezes blew fitfully, and a queer house set with lofty pine shone out white against a lurid sky. . . .

On the next day he walked again past the tower and through the gate and along the winding road. As he left Todd behind him and began the slow ascent among the hills he became conscious of some strange influence that hung over the country like a brooding spirit. The clearness of the preceding day was absent; instead all seemed nebulous and indistinct, and the sad landscape dropped behind and below him in the numb, unreal recession of a dream.

It was about four o'clock, and as he slowly ascended into the mournful tracts the greyness of the late autumn day was deepening into dusk. All the morning, clouds had been gathering in the west, and now the dull ache of the

damp sky gave the uneasy sense of impending rain. Here a fitful wind blew the gold flame of a sear leaf athwart the November gloom, and out along the horizon great leaden masses were marching out to sea.

A terrible sense of loneliness fell upon the solitary walker trudging up into the sighing country, and even the sight of scattered habitations, visible here and there among the shadows, seemed only to intensify his feeling of dream and unreality. Everywhere the uplands strained in the moist wind, and the lines of gaunt firs that marched against the horizon gloom pointed ever out to sea. The wan crowding on of the weeping heavens, the settled pack of those leaning firs, and the fitful scurry of the leaves in the chill blast down the lane smote upon his spirit as something unutterably sad and terrible. On his right a skinny blackthorn shot up hard and wiry towards the dull, grey sky; there ahead trees in a wood fluttered ragged, yellow flags against the dimness.

A human figure appeared before him, and presently he saw that it was a man, apparently a labourer. He carried tools upon his shoulders, and his head was bent so that it was only when Ormerod addressed him that he looked up and showed a withered countenance. "What is the name of all this place?" said Brent, with a wide sweep of his arm.

"This," said the labourer, in a voice so thin and tired that it seemed almost like the cold breath of the wind that drove beside them, "is Hayes-in-the-Up. Of course, though, it'll be a mile further on for you before you get to Fennington." He pointed in the direction from which he had just come, turned his sunken eyes again for a moment upon Ormerod, and then quickly faded down the descending path.

Brent looked after him wondering, but as he swept his gaze about him much of his wonder vanished. All around the wan country seemed to rock giddily beneath those lowering skies, so heavy with the rain that never fell; all around, the sailing uplands seemed to heave and yearn under the sad tooting of the damp November wind. Oh, he could well imagine that the men of this weary, twilight region would be worn and old before their time, with its sinister stare in their eyes and its haggard gloom abroad in their pinched faces!

Thinking thus, he walked on steadily, and it was not

long before certain words of the man he had met rose with uneasy suggestion to the surface of his mind. What, he asked himself, was Fennington? Somehow he did not think that the name stood for another village; rather, the word seemed to connect itself ominously with the dream he had had some little time ago. He shuddered, and had not walked many paces further before he found that his instinct was correct.

Opposite him, across a shallow valley, stood that white house, dimly set in giant pine. Here the winds seemed almost visible as they strove in those lofty trees and the constant rush by of the weeping sky behind made all the view seem to tear giddily through some unreal, watery medium. A striking resemblance of the pines to palm-trees and a queer effect of light which brought the white façade shaking bright against the sailing cloud-banks gave the whole a strangely exotic look.

Gazing at it across the little valley, Ormerod felt somehow that this, indeed, was the centre and hub of the wicked country, the very kernel and essence of this sad, unwholesome land that he saw flung wide in weariness about him. This abomination was it that magnetised him, that attracted him from afar with fatal fascination, and threatened him with untold disaster. Almost sobbing, he descended his side of the valley and then rose again to meet the house.

Park-like land surrounded the building, and from the smooth turf arose the pines and some clusters of shrubs. Amongst these Ormerod walked carefully till he was suddenly so near that he could look into a small room through its open window whilst he sheltered in a large yew whose dusky skirts swept the ground.

The room seemed strangely bare and deserted. A small table was pushed to one side, and dust lay thick upon it. Nearer Ormerod, a chair or two appeared, and, opposite, a great, black mantelpiece glowered in much gloom. In the centre of the floor was set the object that seemed to dominate the whole.

This was a large and cumbrous spinning-wheel of forbidding mien. It glistened foully in the dim light, and its many moulded points pricked the air in very awful fashion. Waiting there in the close stillness, the watcher fancied he could see the treadle stir. Quickly, with beating heart, beset

by sudden dread, he turned away, retraced his steps among the sheltering shrubs, and descended to the valley bottom.

He climbed up the other side, and was glad to walk rapidly away down the winding path till, on turning his head, it was no longer possible to see the evil house he had just left.

It must have been near six o'clock when, on approaching the gate and tower, weary from his walk and anxious to reach the familiar and reassuring atmosphere of the hotel, he came suddenly upon a man walking though the darkness in the same direction as himself. It was Stanton-Boyle.

Ormerod quickly overtook him and spoke. "You have no idea," he said, "how glad I am to see you. We can walk back together now."

As they strolled to the hotel Brent described his walk, and he saw the other trembling. Presently Stanton-Boyle looked at him earnestly and spoke. "I've been there, too," he said, "and I feel just as you do about it. I feel that that place Fennington is the centre of the rottenness. I looked through the window, too, and saw the spinning-wheel and——" He stopped suddenly. "No," he went on quietly a moment later, "I won't tell you what else I saw!"

"It ought to be destroyed!" shouted Ormerod. A curious excitement tingled in his blood. His voice was loud, so that people passing them in the street turned and gazed after them. His eyes were very bright. He went on, pulling Stanton-Boyle's arm impressively. "I shall destroy it!" he said. "I shall burn it and I shall most assuredly smash that old spinning-wheel and break off its horrid spiky points!" He had a vague sense of saying curious and unusual things, but this increased rather than moderated his unaccountable elation.

Stanton-Boyle seemed somewhat abnormal, too. He seemed to be gliding along the pavement with altogether unexampled smoothness and nobility as he turned his glowing eyes on Brent. "Destroy it!" he said. "Burn it! Before it is too late and it destroys you. Do this and you will be an unutterably brave man!"

When they reached the hotel Ormerod found a telegram awaiting him from Joan. He had not written to her for some time and she had grown anxious and was coming down herself on the following day. He must act quickly, before she came, for her mind in this matter would be unsympathetic. That

night as he parted from Stanton-Boyle his eyes blazed in a high resolve. "To-morrow," he said, as he shook the other's hand, "I shall attempt it."

The following morning found the neurotic as good as his word. He carried matches and a tin of oil. His usually pale cheeks were flushed and his eyes sparkled strangely. Those who saw him leave the hotel remembered afterwards how his limbs had trembled and his speech halted. Stanton-Boyle, who was to see him off at the tower, reflected these symptoms in a less degree. Both men were observed to set out arm-in-arm engaged in earnest conversation.

At about noon Stanton-Boyle returned. He had walked with Ormerod to the sand dunes, and there left him to continue on his strange mission alone. He had seen him pass the tower, strike the fatal gate in the slanting morning sun, and then dwindle up the winding path till he was no more than an intense, pathetic dot along that way of mystery.

As he returned he was aware of companionship along the street. He looked round and noticed a policeman strolling in much abstraction some fifty yards behind him. Again at the hotel-entrance he turned about. The same figure in blue uniform was visible, admiring the houses opposite from the shade of an adjacent lamp-post. Stanton-Boyle frowned and withdrew to lunch.

At half-past two Joan arrived. She inquired nervously for Ormerod, and was at once addressed by Stanton-Boyle, who had waited for her in the entrance hall as desired by Brent. "Mr. Ormerod," he told her, "is out. He is very sorry. Will you allow me the impropriety of introducing myself? My name is Stanton-Boyle. . . ."

Joan tore open the note which had been left for her by Ormerod. She seemed to find the contents unsatisfactory, for she proceeded to catechise Stanton-Boyle upon her brother's health and general habit of life at Todd. Following this she left the hotel hastily after ascertaining the direction from which Ormerod might be expected to return.

Stanton-Boyle waited. The moments passed, heavy, anxious, weighted with the sense of coming trouble. He sat and smoked. Discreet and muffled noises from within the hotel seemed full somehow of uneasy suggestion and foreboding. Outside, the street looked very gloomy in the November darkness. Something, assuredly, would happen directly.

It came suddenly. A sound of tramping feet and excited cries that grew rapidly in volume and woke strange echoes in the reserved autumnal roads. Presently the tumult lessened abruptly,* and only broken, fitful shouts and staccato ejaculations stabbed the silence. Stanton-Boyle jumped to his feet and walked hurriedly to the entrance hall.

Here there were cries and hustlings and presently strong odours and much suppressed excitement. He saw Joan talking very quickly to the manager of the hotel. She seemed to be developing a Point-of-View, and it was evident that it was not the manager's. For some time the press of people prevented him from discovering the cause of the commotion, but here and there he could make out detached sentences: "Tried to set old Hackney's farm on fire——" "But they'd seen him before and another man, too, so——" "Asleep in the barn several times."

Before long all but the hotel residents had dispersed, and in the centre of the considerable confusion which still remained, it was now possible to see Ormerod supported by two policemen. A third hovered in the background with a large note-book. As Stanton-Boyle gazed, Brent lifted his bowed head so that their eyes met. "I have done it," he said. "I smashed it up. I brought back one of its points in my pocket. . . . Overcoat, left hand . . . as a proof." Having pronounced which words Mr. Ormerod fainted very quietly.

For some time there was much disturbance. The necessary arrangements for the temporary pacification of the Law and of the Hotel had to be carried through, and after that Ormerod had to be got to bed. It was only after the initial excitement had in large measure abated that Stanton-Boyle ventured to discuss the matter over the after-dinner coffee. He had recognised one of the three policemen as the man whom he had noticed in the morning, and had found it well to retire from observation until he and his companions had left the hotel. Now, however, he felt at liberty to explain his theories of the situation to such as chose to listen.

He held forth with peculiar vehemence and with appropriate gestures. He spoke of a new kind of *terre-mauvaise*, of strange regions, connected, indeed, with definite geographical limits upon the earth, yet somehow apart from them and beyond them. "The relation," he said, "is rather one of parallelism and correspondence than of actual connection.

I honestly believe that these regions do exist, and are quite as 'real' in their way as the ordinary world we know. We might say they consist in a special and separated set of stimuli to which only certain minds in certain conditions are able to respond. Such a district seems to be superimposed upon the country to the south-west of this place."

A laugh arose. "You won't get the magistrate to believe that," said someone. "Why, all where you speak of past that gate by the dunes is just old Hackney's farm and nothing else."

"Of course," said another. "It was one of old Hackney's barns he was setting alight, I understand. I was speaking to one of the policemen about it. He said that fellow Ormerod had always been fossicking around there, and had gone to sleep in the barn twice. I expect it's all bad dreams."

A third spoke derisively. "Surely," he said, "you don't really expect us to believe in your Bad Lands. It's like Jack-in-the-Beanstalk."

"All right!" said Stanton-Boyle. "Have it your own way! I know my use of the term 'Bad Lands' may be called incorrect, because it usually means that bit in the States, you know—but that's a detail. I tell you I've run up against things like this before. There was the case of Dolly Wishart, but no, I won't say anything about that—you wouldn't believe it."

The group around looked at him oddly. Suddenly there was a stir, and a man appeared in the doorway. He carried Ormerod's overcoat.

"This may settle the matter," he said. "I heard him say he'd put something in the pocket. He said——"

Stanton-Boyle interrupted him excitedly. "Why, yes," he said, "I'd forgotten that. What I was telling you about—the spinning-wheel. It will be interesting to see if——" He stopped and fumbled in the pockets. In another moment he brought out something which he held in his extended hand for all to see.

It was part of the handle of a patent separator—an object familiar enough to any who held even meagre acquaintance with the life of farms, and upon it could still be discerned the branded letters G. P. H.

"George Philip Hackney," interpreted the unbelievers with many smiles.

J. D. BERESFORD

The Misanthrope
Powers of the Air

THE MISANTHROPE

I

SINCE I have returned from the rock and discussed the story in all its bearings, I have begun to wonder if the man made a fool of me. In the depths of my consciousness I feel that he did not. Nevertheless, I cannot resist the effect of all the laughter that has been evoked by my narrative. Here on the mainland the whole thing seems unlikely, grotesque, foolish. On the rock the man's confession carried absolute conviction. The setting is everything; and I am, perhaps, thankful that my present circumstances are so beautifully conducive to sanity. No one appreciates the mystery of life more than I do; but when the mystery involves such a doubt of oneself, I find it pleasanter to forget. Naturally, I do not want to believe the story. If I did I should know myself to be some kind of human horror. And the terror of it all lies in the fact that I may never know precisely what kind . . .

Before I went we had eliminated the facile and banal explanation that the man was mad, and had fallen back upon the two inevitable alternatives: Crime and Disappointed Love. We were human and romantic, and we tried desperately hard not to be too obvious.

Once before a man had made the same attempt and had built or tried to build a house on the Gulland rock; but he had been defeated within a fortnight, and what was left of his building was taken off the Island and turned into a tin church. It is there still. We all went to Trevone and ruminated over and round it, perhaps with some faint hope that one of us might, all-unknowingly, have the abilities of a psychometrist.

Nothing came of that visit but a slight intensification of those theories that were already becoming a little stale.

We compare the early failure of thirty years ago, the attempt that was baffled, with the present success. For this new misanthrope had lived on the Gulland through the whole winter—and still lived. Indeed, the fact of his presence on that awful lump of rock was now accepted by the country people; to them he was scarcely a shade madder than the other visitors; that remunerative, recurrent host that this year broke their journey to Bedruthan in order to stand on Trevone beach and stare foolishly at the just visible hut that stuck like a cubical gall on the landward face of that humped, desolate island.

We all did that; stared at nothing in particular and meditated enormously; but in what I felt at the time was a wild spirit of adventure, I went out one night to the point of Gunver Head and saw an actual light within that distant hut; a patch of golden lichen on the mother parasite.

Some aspect of humanity I found in that light it was that finally decided me; that and some quality of sympathy, perhaps with the hermit—mad, criminal, or lovelorn?—who had found sanctuary from the pestilent touch of the encroaching crowd. It was, in fact, a wildish night, and I stayed until the little yellow speck went out, and all I could see through the murk was an occasional canopy of curving spray when the elbow of the Trevoise Light touched a bare corner of that black Gulland.

The making of a decision was no difficult matter, but while I waited for the necessary calm that would permit the occasional boat to land provisions on the island two miles out from the mainland, I suffered qualms of doubt and nervousness. And I suffered them alone, for I had determined that no hint of my adventure should be given to anyone of our party until the voyage had been made. They might think that I had gone fishing, an excuse which had all the air of probability given to it by the coming of the boatman to say that the tide and wind would serve that morning. I had warned—and bribed—him to give no clue to my friends of the goal of my proposed excursion.

My nervousness suffered no decrease as we approached the rock and saw the authentic figure of its single inhabitant awaiting our arrival. I had some consolation in the thought that he would be in some way prepared by the sight of our surprisingly passengered boat; but my mind shuddered at

the necessity for using some conventional form of address if I would make at once my introduction and excuse. The civilised opening was so hopelessly incapable of expressing my sympathy, presenting instead so unmistakably, it seemed to me, the single solution of common curihsity. I wondered that he had not—as the boatman so clearly assured me was the case—had other prying visitors before me.

My self-consciousness increased as we came nearer to the single opening among the spiked rocks, that served as a miniature harbour at half-tide. I felt that I was being watched by the man who now stood awaiting us at the water's edge. And suddenly my spirit broke, I decided that I could not force myself upon him, that I would remain in the boat while its cargo was delivered, and then return with the boatmen to Trevone. So resolute was I in this plan that when we had pulled in to the tiny landing-place, I kept my gaze steadfastly averted from the man I had come to see, and stared solemnly out at the humped back of Trevoze, seen now in an entirely new aspect.

The sound of the hermit's voice startled me from a perfectly genuine abstraction.

"Fairly decent weather to-day," he remarked with, I thought, a touch of nervousness. He had, I remembered, addressed the same remark to the boatmen, who were now conveying their cargo up to the hut.

I looked up and met his stare. He was, indeed, regarding me with a curious effect of concentration, as if he were eager to note every detail of my expression.

"Jolly," I replied. "Been pretty beastly the last day or two. Kept you rather short, hasn't it?"

"I make allowances for that," he said. "Keep a reserve, you know. Are you staying over there?" He nodded towards the bay.

"For a week or two," I told him, and we began to discuss the country around Harlyn with the eagerness of two strangers who find a common topic at a dull reception.

"Never been on the Gulland before, I suppose?" he ventured at last, when the boatmen had discharged their load and were evidently ready to be off.

"No, no, I haven't," I said, and hesitated. I felt that the invitation must come from him.

He boggled over it by saying, "Dashed awkward place

to get to, and nothing to see, of course. I don't know if you're at all keen on fishing?"

"Rather," I said with enthusiasm.

"There's deep water on the other side of the rock," he went on. "In the right weather you get splendid bass there." He stopped and then added, "It'll be absolutely top hole for 'em, this afternoon."

"Perhaps I could come back . . ." I began; but the boatman interrupted me at once.

"Yew can coom back to-morrow, sure 'nough," he said. "Tide only serves wance avery twalve hours."

"If you'd care to stay, now . . ." began the hermit.

"Thanks! it's awfully good of you. I should like to of all things," I said.

I stayed on the clear understanding that the boatmen were to fetch me the next morning.

II

At first there was really very little that seemed in any way strange about the man on the Gulland. His name, he told me, was William Copley, but it appeared that he was no relation to the Copleys I knew. And if he had shaved he would have looked a very ordinary type of Englishman roughing it on a holiday. His age I judged to be between thirty and forty.

Only two things about him struck me as a little queer during our very successful afternoon's fishing. The first was that intense appraising stare of his, as if he tried to fathom the very depths of one's being. The second was an inexplicable devotion to one particular form of ceremony. As our intimacy grew, he dropped the ordinary formal politeness of a host; but he insisted always on one observance that I supposed at first to be the merely conventional business of giving precedence.

Nothing would induce him to go in front of me. He sent me ahead even as we explored the little purlieus of his rock—the only level square yard on the whole island was in the floor of the hut. But presently I noticed that this peculiarity went still further, and that he would not turn his back on me for a single moment.

That discovery intrigued one. I still excluded the explanation of madness—Copley's manner and conversation were so convincingly sane. But I reverted to and elaborated those other two suggestions that had been made. I would not avoid the inference that the man must in some strange way be afraid of me; and I hesitated as to whether he were flying from some form of justice or from revenge, perhaps a vendetta. Either theory seemed to account for his intense, appraising stare. I inferred that his longing for companionship had grown so strong that he had determined to risk the possibility of my being an emissary, sent by some—to me—exquisitely romantic person or persons who desired Copley's death. I recalled, and wallowed in, some of the marvellous imaginings of the novelist. I wondered if I could make Copley speak by convincing him of my innocent identity. How I thrilled at the prospect!

But the explanation of it all came without any effort on my part.

He sent me out of the hut while he prepared our supper—quite a magnificent meal, by the way. I saw his reason at once; he could not manage all that business of cooking and laying the table without turning his back on me. One thing, however, puzzled me a little; he drew down the blind of the little square window as soon as I had gone outside.

Naturally, I made no demur. I climbed down to the edge of the sea—it was a glorious evening—and waited until he called me. He stood at the door of the hut until I was within a few feet of him, and then retreated into the room and sat down with his back to the wall.

We discussed our afternoon's sport as we had supper, but when we had finished and our pipes were going, he said, suddenly:

"I don't see why I shouldn't tell you."

Like a fool, I agreed eagerly, when I might so easily have stopped him. . . .

"It began when I was quite a kid," he said. "My mother found me crying in the garden; and all I could tell her was that Claude, my elder brother, looked 'horrid.' I couldn't bear the sight of him for days afterwards, either; but I was such a perfectly normal child that they weren't seriously perturbed about this one idiosyncrasy of mine. They thought

that Claude had 'made a face' at me, and frightened me. My father whacked me for it eventually.

"Perhaps that whacking stuck in my mind. Anyway, I didn't confide my peculiarity to anyone until I was nearly seventeen. I was ashamed of it, of course. I am still—in a way."

He stopped and looked down, pushed his plate away from him, and folded his arms on the table. I was pining to ask a question, but I was afraid to interrupt. And after a moment's hesitation he looked up and held my gaze again, but now without that inquiring look of his. Rather, he seemed to be looking for sympathy.

"I told my house-master," he said. "He was a splendid chap, and he was very decent about it; took it all quite seriously and advised me to consult an oculist, which I did. I went in the holidays with the pater—I had given him a more reasonable account of my trouble—and he took me to the best man in London. He was tremendously interested, and it proves that there must be something in it, that it can't be imagination, because he really found a defect in my eyes, something quite new to him, he said. He called it a new form of astigmatism; but, of course, as he pointed out, no glasses would be any use to me."

"But what . . . ?" I began, unable to keep down my curiosity any longer.

Copley hesitated, and dropped his eyes. "Astigmatism, you know," he said, "is a defect—I quote the dictionary. I learned that definition by heart; I often puzzle over it still—'causing images of lines having a certain direction to be indistinctly seen, while those of lines transverse to the former are distinctly seen.' Only mine is peculiar in the fact that my sight is perfectly normal except when I look back at anyone over my shoulder." He looked up, almost pathetically. I could see that he hoped I might understand without further explanation.

I had to confess myself utterly mystified. What had this trifling defect of vision to do with his coming to live on the Gulland, I wondered.

I frowned my perplexity. "But I don't see . . ." I said.

He knocked out his pipe and began to scrape the bowl with his pocket-knife. "Well, mine is a kind of moral astigmatism, too," he said. "At least, it gives me a kind

of moral insight. I'm afraid I must call it insight. I've proved in some cases that . . ." He dropped his voice. He was apparently deeply engrossed in the scraping out of his pipe. He kept his eyes on it as he continued.

"Normally, you understand, when I look at people straight in the face, I see them as anybody else sees them. But when I look back at them over my shoulder I see . . . oh! I see all their vices and defects. Their faces remain, in a sense the same, perfectly recognisable, I mean, but distorted—bestly. . . . There was my brother Claude—good-looking chap, he was—but when I saw him . . . that way . . . he had a nose like a parrot, and he looked sort of weakly voracious . . . and vicious." He stopped and shuddered slightly, and then added: "And one knows, now, that he is like that, too. He's just been hammered on the Stock Exchange. Rotten sort of failure it was. . . ."

"And then Denison, my house-master, you know; such a decent chap. I never looked at him, that way, until the end of my last term at school. I had got into the habit, more or less, of never looking over my shoulder, you see. But I was always getting caught. That was an instance. I was playing for the School against the Old Boys. Denison called out, 'Good luck, old chap,' just as I was going in, and I forgot and looked back at him. . . ."

I waited, breathless, and as he did not go on, I prompted him with "Was he . . . 'wrong' too?"

Copley nodded. "Weak, poor devil. His eyes were all right, but they were fighting his mouth, if you know what I mean. There would have been an awful scandal at the school there, four years after I left, if they hadn't hushed it up and got Denison out of the country.

"Then, if you want any more instances, there was the oculist—big, fine chap, he was. Of course, he made me look at him over my shoulder, to test me. He asked me what I saw, and I told, more or less. He was simply livid for a moment. He was a sensualist, you see; and when I saw him that way he looked like some filthy old hog.

"The thing that really finished me," he went on, after a long interval, "was the breaking off of my engagement to Helen. We were frightfully in love with one another, and I told her about my trouble. She was very sympathetic, and I suppose rather sentimentally romantic, too. She believed it was some sort of spell that had been put on me.

I think, anyway, she had a theory that if I once saw anybody truly and ordinarily over my shoulder, I should never have any more trouble—the spell-would-be-broken sort of thing. And, of course, *she* wanted to be the person. I didn't resist her much. I was infatuated, I suppose. Anyway, I thought she was perfection and that it was simply impossible that I could find any defect in her. So I agreed, and looked—that way. . . .”

His voice had fallen to an even note of despondency, as though the telling of this final tragedy in his life had brought him to the indifference of despair. “I looked,” he continued, “and saw a creature with no chin and watery, doting eyes; a faithful, slobbery thing—cugh! I can't . . . I never spoke to her again. . . .”

“That broke me, you know,” he said presently. “After that I didn't care. I used to look at everyone that way, until I had to get away from humanity. I was living in a world of beasts. Most of them looked like some beast or bird or other. The strong were vicious and criminal; and the weak were loathsome. I couldn't stick it. In the end—I had to come here away from them all.”

A thought occurred to me. “Have you ever looked at yourself in the glass?” I asked.

He nodded. “I'm no better than the rest of them,” he said. “That's why I grew this rotten beard. I hadn't got a looking-glass here.”

“And you can't keep a stiff neck, as it were,” I asked, “going about looking humanity straight in the face?”

“The temptation is too strong,” Copley said. “And it gets stronger. Curiosity, partly, I suppose; but partly it's the momentary sense of superiority it gives you. You see them like that, you know, and forget how you look yourself. And then after a bit it sickens you.”

“You haven't . . .” I said, and hesitated, I wanted to know, and yet I was horribly afraid. “You haven't,” I began again, “er—you haven't—er—looked at me yet . . . that way?”

“Not yet,” he said.

“Do you suppose . . .?”

“Probably. You look all right, of course. But then so did heaps of the others.”

“You've no idea *how* I should look to you, that way?”

"Absolutely none. I've been trying to guess, but I can't."

"You wouldn't care . . . ?"

"Not now," he said sharply. "Perhaps, just before you go."

"You feel fairly certain, then . . . ?"

He nodded, with disgusting conviction.

I went to bed, wondering whether Helen's theory wasn't a true one; and if I might not break the spell for poor Copley.

III

The boatmen came for me soon after eleven next morning.

I had shaken off some of the feeling of superstitious horror that had held me overnight, and I had not repeated my request to Copley; nor had he offered to look into the dark places of my soul.

He came down after me to the landing-place and we shook hands warmly, but he said nothing about my revisiting him.

And then, just as we were putting off, he turned back towards the hut and looked at me over his shoulder—just one quick glance.

"Wait," I commanded the boatmen, and I stood up and called to him.

"I say, Copley," I shouted.

He turned and looked at me, and I saw that his face was transfigured. He wore an expression of foolish disgust and loathing, I had seen something like it on the face of an idiot child who was just going to be sick.

I dropped down into the boat and turned my back on him.

I wondered then if that was how he had seen himself in the glass.

But since I have only wondered what it was he saw in me. . . .

And I can never go back to ask him.

POWERS OF THE AIR

I FORESAW the danger that threatened him. He was so ignorant, and his sight had been almost destroyed in the city streets. A trustful ignorance is the beginning of wisdom, but these townspeople are conceited with their foolish book-learning; and reading darkens the eyes of the mind.

I began to warn him in early October, when the gales roar far up in the sky. 'They are harmless then; they tear at the ricks and the slate roofs, and waste themselves in stripping the trees; but we are safe until the darkness comes.

I took him to the crown of the stubble land, and turned him with his back to the dark thread of the sea. I pointed to the rooks tumbling about the sky like scattered leaves that sported in a mountain wind.

"We are past the turn," I said. "The black time is coming."

He stood thoughtlessly watching the ecstatic rooks. "Is it some game they play?" he asked.

I shook my head. "They belong to the darkness," I told him.

He looked at me in that slightly forbearing way of his, and said, "Another of your superstitions."

I was silent for a moment. I stared down at the texture of black fields ploughed for winter wheat, and thought of all the writing that lay before us under that wild October hill, all the clear signs that he could never be taught to read.

"Knowledge," I said. I was afraid for him, and I wished to save him. He had been penned in that little world of the town like a caged gull. He had been blinded by staring at the boards of his coop.

He smiled condescendingly. "You are charmingly primitive still," he said. "Do you worship the sun in secret, and make propitiatory offerings to the thunder?"

I sighed, knowing that if I would save him I must try

to reach his mind by the ear, by the dull and clumsy means of language. That is the fetish of these townspeople. They have no wisdom, only a little recognition of those things that can be described in printed or spoken words. And I dreaded the effort of struggling with the infirmity of this obstinate blind youth.

"I came out here to warn you," I began.

"Against what?" he asked.

"The forces that have power in the black time," I said. "Even now they are beginning to gather strength. In a month it will not be safe for you to go out on the cliffs after sunset. You may not believe me, but won't you accept my warning in good faith?"

He patronised me with his smile. "What are these forces?" he asked.

That is the manner of these book-folk. They are always for names. If they can but label a thing in a word or in a volume of description they are satisfied that they have achieved knowledge. They bandy these names of theirs as a talisman.

"Who knows?" I replied. "We have learnt their power. Call them what you will, you cannot change them by any baptism."

"Well, what do they *do*?" he said, still tolerant. "Have you ever seen them?" he added, as if he would trick me.

I had, but how could I describe them to him? Can one explain the colours of autumn to a man born blind? Or is there any language which will set out the play of a breaker among the rocks? How, then, could I talk to him of that which I had known only in the fear of my soul?

"Have you ever seen the wind?" I said.

He laughed. "Well, then, tell me your evidence," he replied.

I searched my mind for something that he might regard as evidence. "Men," I said, "used to believe that the little birds, the finches and the tits, rushed blindly at the lantern of the lighthouses, and dashed themselves to death as a moth will dash itself into the candle. But now they know that the birds only seek a refuge near the light, and that they will rest till dawn on the perches that are built for them."

"Quite true," he agreed. "And what then?"

"The little birds are prey to the powers of the air when the darkness comes," I said; "and their only chance of

life is to come within the beam of the protecting light. And when they could find no place to rest, they hovered and fluttered until they were weak with the ache of flight, and fell a little into the darkness; then in panic and despair they fled back and overshot their mark."

"But gulls . . ." he began.

"A few," I interrupted him. "A few, although they, also, belong to the wild and the darkness. They fall in chasing the little birds, who, like us, are a quarry."

"A pretty fable," he said; but I saw that the shadow of a doubt had fallen across him, and when he asked me another question I would not reply . . .

I took him to the door at ten o'clock that night and made him listen to the revels in the upper air. Below, it was almost still and very dark, for the moon was near the new, and the clouds were travelling North in diligent masses that would presently bring rain.

"Do you hear them?" I asked.

He shivered slightly, and pretended that the air was cold . . .

As the nights drew in, I began to hope that he had taken my warning to heart. He did not speak of it, but he took his walks while the sun edged across its brief arc of the sky.

I took comfort in the thought that some dim sense of vision was still left to him; and one afternoon, when the black time was almost come, I walked with him on the cliffs. I meant then to test him; to discover if, indeed, some feeble remnant of sight was yet his.

The wind had hidden itself that day, but I knew that it lurked in the grey depths that hung on the sea's horizon. Its outrunners streaked the falling blue of the sky with driven spirits of white cloud; and the long swell of the rising sea cried out with fear as it fled, breaking, to its death.

I said no word to him, then, of the coming peril. We walked to the cliff's edge and watched the thousand runnels of foam that laced the blackness of Trescore rock with milk-white threads, as those driven rollers cast themselves against the land and burst moon-high in their last despair.

"We saw the darkness creeping towards us out of the far distance, and then we turned from the sea and saw how the coming shadow was already quenching the hills. All the earth was hardening itself to await the night.

"God! what a lonely place!" he said.

It seemed lonely to him, but I saw the little creeping movements among the black roots of the furze. To me the place seemed over-populous. Nevertheless I took it as a good sign that he had found a sense of loneliness; it is a sense that often precedes the coming of knowledge. . . .

And when the darkness of winter had come I thought he was safe. He was always back in the house by sunset, and he went little to the cliffs. But now and again he would look at me with something of defiance in his face, as if he braced himself to meet an argument.

I gave him no encouragement to speak. I believed that no knowledge could come to him by that way, that no words of mine could help him. And I was right. But he forced speech upon me. He faced me one afternoon in the depths of the black time. He was stiffened to oppose me.

"It's absurd," he said, "to pretend a kind of superior wisdom. If you can't give me some reason for this superstition of yours I must go out and test it for myself."

I knew my own feebleness, and I tried to prevaricate by saying: "I gave you reasons."

"They will all bear at least two explanations," he said.

"At least wait," I pleaded. "You are so young."

He was a little softened by my weakness, but he was resolute. He meant to teach me, to prove that he was right. He lifted his head proudly and smiled.

"Youth is the age of courage and experiment," he boasted.

"Of recklessness and curiosity," was my amendment.

"I am going," he said.

"You will never come back," I warned him.

"But if I do come back," he said, "will you admit that I am right?"

I would not accept so foolish a challenge. "Some escape," I said.

"I will go every night until you are convinced," he returned.

"Before the winter is over, you shall come with me. I will cure you of your fear."

I was angry then; and I turned my back upon him. I heard him go out and made no effort to hinder him. I sat and brooded and consoled myself with the thought that he would surely return at dusk.

I waited until sunset and he had not come back.

I went to the window and saw that a dying yellow still

shone feebly in the west ; and I watched it as I have watched the last flicker of a lantern when a friend makes his way home across the hill.

Already the horrified clouds were leaping up in terror from the edge of the sea, coming with outflung arms that sprawled across the hollow sky.

I went into the hall and found my hat ; and then stood there in the twilight listening for the sound of a footstep. I could not believe that he would stay on the cliff after the darkness had come. I hesitated and listened while the shadows crept together in the corners of the hall.

He had taunted me with my cowardice, and I knew that I must go and seek him. But before I opened the door I waited again and strained my ears so eagerly for the click and shriek of the gate that I created the sound in my own mind. And yet, as I heard it, I knew it for a phantasm.

At last I went out suddenly and fiercely.

A gust of wind shook me before I had reached the gate, and the air was full of intimidating sound. I heard the cry of the driven clouds, and the awful shout of the pursuers mingled with the clamouring and thudding of the endless companies that hurried across the width of heaven.

I dared not look up. I clutched my head with my arms, and ran stumbling to the foot of the path that climbs to the height of the undefended cliff.

I tried to call him, but my voice was caught in the rout of air ; my shout was torn from me and dispersed among the atoms of scuttling foam that huddled a moment among the rocks before they leaped to dissolution.

I stooped to the lee of the singing furze. I dared go no further. Beyond was all the riot, where the mad sport took strange shapes of soaring whirlpools and sudden draughts and wonderful calms that suckingly enticed the unknowing to the cliff's edge.

I knew that it would be useless to seek him now. The scream of the gale had mounted unendurably ; he could not be still alive up there in the midst of that reeling fury.

I crept back to the road and the shelter of the cutting, and then I fled to my house.

For a long hour I sat over the fire seeking some peace of mind. I blamed myself most bitterly that I had not hindered him. I might have given way ; have pretended conviction,

or, at least, some sympathy with his rash and foolish ignorance. But presently I found consolation in the thought that his fate had always been inevitable. What availed any effort of mine against the unquestionable forces that had pronounced his doom? I listened to the thudding procession that marched through the upper air, and to the shrieking of the spirits that come down to torture and destroy the things of earth; and I knew that no effort of mine could have saved him. . . .

And when the outer door banged, and I heard his footsteps in the hall, I believed that he was appearing to me at the moment of his death; but when he came into the room with shining eyes and bright cheeks, laughing and tossing the hair back from his forehead, I was curiously angry.

"Where have you been?" I asked. "I went out to the cliff to find you, and thought you were dead."

"You came to the cliffs?" he said.

"To the foot of the cliff," I confessed.

"Ah! you must never go further than that in the black time," he said.

"Then you believe me now?" I asked.

He smiled. "I believe that *you* would be in danger up there to-night," he said, "because you believe in the powers of the air, and you are afraid."

He stood in the doorway, braced by his struggle with the wind; and his young eyes were glowing with the consciousness of discovery and new knowledge.

Yet he cannot deny that I showed him the way.

E. F. BENSON

Mrs. Amworth

MRS. AMWORTH

THE village of Maxley, where, last summer and autumn, these strange events took place, lies on a heathery and pine-clad upland of Sussex. In all England you could not find a sweeter and saner situation. Should the wind blow from the south, it comes laden with the spices of the sea, to the east high downs protect it from the inclemencies of March; and from the west and north the breezes which reach it travel over miles of aromatic forest and heather. The village itself is insignificant enough in point of population, but rich in amenities and beauty. Half-way down the single street, with its broad road and spacious areas of grass on each side, stands the little Norman Church and the antique graveyard long disused: for the rest there are a dozen small sedate Georgian houses, red-bricked and long-windowed, each with a square of flower-garden in front, and an ampler strip behind; a score of shops, and a couple of score of thatched cottages belonging to labourers on neighbouring estates, complete the entire cluster of its peaceful habitations. The general peace, however, is sadly broken on Saturdays and Sundays, for we lie on one of the main roads between London and Brighton and our quiet street becomes a race-course for flying motor-cars and bicycles. A notice just outside the village begging them to go slowly only seems to encourage them to accelerate their speed, for the road lies open and straight, and there is really no reason why they should do otherwise. By way of protest, therefore, the ladies of Maxley cover their noses and mouths with their handkerchiefs as they see a motor-car approaching, though, as the street is asphalted, they need not really take these precautions against dust. But late on Sunday night the horde of scorchers has passed, and we settle down again to five days of cheerful and leisurely seclusion. Railway strikes which agitate the country so much leave us undis-

turbed because most of the inhabitants of Maxley never leave it at all.

I am the fortunate possessor of one of these small Georgian houses, and consider myself no less fortunate in having so interesting and stimulating a neighbour as Francis Urcombe, who, the most confirmed of Maxleyites, has not slept away from his house, which stands just opposite to mine in the village street, for nearly two years, at which date, though still in middle life, he resigned his Physiological Professorship at Cambridge University, and devoted himself to the study of those occult and curious phenomena which seem equally to concern the physical and the psychical sides of human nature. Indeed his retirement was not unconnected with his passion for the strange uncharted places that lie on the confines and borders of science, the existence of which is so stoutly denied by the more materialistic minds, for he advocated that all medical students should be obliged to pass some sort of examination in mesmerism, and that one of the tripos papers should be designed to test their knowledge in such subjects as appearances at time of death, haunted houses, vampirism, automatic writing and possession.

"Of course, they wouldn't listen to me," ran his account of the matter, "for there is nothing that these seats of learning are so frightened of as knowledge, and the road to knowledge lies in the study of things like these. The functions of the human frame are, broadly speaking, known. They are a country, anyhow, that has been charted and mapped out. But outside that lie huge tracts of undiscovered country, which certainly exist, and the real pioneers of knowledge are those who, at the cost of being derided as credulous and superstitious, want to push on into those misty and probably perilous places. I felt that I could be of more use by setting out without compass or knapsack into the mists than by sitting in a cage like a canary and chirping about what was known. Besides, teaching is very very bad for a man who knows himself only to be a learner: you only need to be a self-conceited ass to teach."

Here, then, in Francis Urcombe, was a delightful neighbour to one who, like himself, has an uneasy and burning curiosity about what he called the "misty and perilous places"; and this last spring we had a further and most welcome addition to our pleasant little community, in the person of Mrs.

Amworth, widow of an Indian civil servant. Her husband had been a judge in the North-West Provinces, and after his death at Peshawar she came back to England, and after a year in London found herself starving for the ampler air and sunshine of the country to take the place of the fogs and griminess of town. She had, too, a special reason for settling in Maxley, since her ancestors up till a hundred years ago had long been native to the place, and in the old churchyard, now disused, are many gravestones bearing her maiden name of Chaston. Big and energetic, her vigorous and genial personality speedily woke Maxley up to a higher degree of sociality than it had ever known. Most of us were bachelors or spinsters or elderly folk not much inclined to exert ourselves in the expense and effort of hospitality, and hitherto the gaiety of a small tea-party, with bridge afterwards and goloshes (when it was wet) to trip home in again for a solitary dinner, was about the climax of our festivities.

But Mrs. Amworth showed us a more gregarious way, and set an example of luncheon-parties and little dinners, which we began to follow. On other nights when no such hospitality was on foot, a lone man like myself found it pleasant to know that a call on the telephone to Mrs. Amworth's house not a hundred yards off, and an inquiry as to whether I might come after dinner for a game of piquet before bed-time, would probably evoke a response of welcome. There she would be, with a comrade-like eagerness for companionship, and there was a glass of port and a cup of coffee and a cigarette and a game of piquet. She played the piano, too, in a free and exuberant manner, and had a charming voice and sang to her own accompaniment; and as the days drew long and the light lingered late, we played our game in her garden, which in the course of a few months she had turned from being a nursery for slugs and snails into a glowing patch of luxuriant blossoming. She was always cheery and jolly; she was interested in everything, and in music, in gardening, in games of all sorts was a competent performer. Everybody (with one exception) liked her, everybody felt her to bring with her the tonic of a sunny day.

That one exception was Francis Urcombe; he, though he confessed he did not like her, acknowledged that he was vastly interested in her. This always seemed strange to me, for pleasant and jovial as she was, I could see nothing in

her that could call forth conjecture or intrigued surmise, so healthy and unmysterious a figure did she present. But of the genuineness of Urcombe's interest there could be no doubt; one could see him watching and scrutinising her. In matter of age, she frankly volunteered the information that she was forty-five; but her briskness, her activity, her unravaged skin, her coal-black hair, made it difficult to believe that she was not adopting an unusual device, and adding ten years on to her age instead of subtracting them.

Often, also, as our quite unsentimental friendship ripened, Mrs. Amworth would ring me up and propose her advent. If I was busy writing, I was to give her, so we definitely bargained, a frank negative, and in answer I could hear her jolly laugh and her wishes for a successful evening of work. Sometimes, before her proposal arrived, Urcombe would already have stepped across from his house opposite for a smoke and a chat, and he, hearing who my intending visitor was, always urged me to beg her to come. She and I should play piquet, said he, and he would look on, if we did not object, and learn something of the game. But I doubt whether he paid much attention to it, for nothing could be clearer than that, under that penthouse of forehead and thick eyebrows, his attention was fixed not on the cards, but on one of the players. But he seemed to enjoy an hour spent thus, and often, until one particular evening in July, he would watch her with the air of a man who has some deep problem in front of him.

She, enthusiastically keen about our game, seemed not to notice his scrutiny. Then came that evening when, as I see in the light of subsequent events, began the first twitching of the veil that hid the secret horror from my eyes. I did not know it then, though I noticed that thereafter, if she rang up to propose coming round, she always asked not only if I was at leisure, but whether Mr. Urcombe was with me. If so, she said, she would not spoil the chat of two old bachelors, and laughingly wished me good night. Urcombe, on this occasion, had been with me for some half-hour before Mrs. Amworth's appearance, and had been talking to me about the mediæval beliefs concerning vampirism, one of those borderland subjects which he declared had not been sufficiently studied before it had been consigned by the medical profession to the dust-heap of exploded superstitions.

There he sat, grim and eager, tracing, with that pellucid clearness which had made him in his Cambridge days so admirable a lecturer, the history of those mysterious visitations. In them all there were the same general features: one of those ghoulish spirits took up its abode in a living man or woman, conferring supernatural powers of bat-like flight and glutting itself with nocturnal blood-feasts. When its host died it continued to dwell in the corpse, which remained undecayed. By day it rested, by night it left the grave and went on its awful errands. No European country in the Middle Ages seemed to have escaped them; earlier yet, parallels were to be found, in Roman and Greek and in Jewish history.

"It's a large order to set all that evidence aside as being moonshine," he said. "Hundreds of totally independent witnesses in many ages have testified to the occurrence of these phenomena, and there's no explanation known to me which covers all the facts. And if you feel inclined to say 'Why, then, if these are facts, do we not come across them now?' there are two answers I can make you. One is that there were diseases known in the Middle Ages, such as the black death, which were certainly existent then and which have become extinct since, but for that reason we do not assert that such diseases never existed. Just as the black death visited England and decimated the population of Norfolk, so here in this very district about three hundred years ago there was certainly an outbreak of vampirism, and Maxley was the centre of it. My second answer is even more convincing, for I tell you that vampirism is by no means extinct now. An outbreak of it certainly occurred in India a year or two ago."

At that moment I heard my knocker plied in the cheerful and peremptory manner in which Mrs. Amworth is accustomed to announce her arrival, and I went to the door to open it.

"Come in at once," I said, "and save me from having my blood curdled. Mr. Urcombe has been trying to alarm me."

Instantly her vital, voluminous presence seemed to fill the room.

"Ah, but how lovely!" she said. "I delight in having my blood curdled. Go on with your ghost-story, Mr. Urcombe. I adore ghost-stories."

I saw that, as his habit was, he was intently observing her.

"It wasn't a ghost-story exactly," said he. "I was only telling our host how vampirism was not extinct yet. I was saying that there was an outbreak of it in India only a few years ago."

There was a more than perceptible pause, and I saw that if Urcombe was observing her, she on her side was observing him with fixed eye and parted mouth. Then her jolly laugh invaded that rather tense silence.

"Oh, what a shame!" she said. "You're not going to curdle my blood at all. Where did you pick up such a tale. Mr. Urcombe? I have lived for years in India and never heard a rumour of such a thing. Some story-teller in the bazaars must have invented it: they are famous at that."

I could see that Urcombe was on the point of saying something further, but checked himself.

"Ah! very likely that was it," he said.

But something had disturbed our usual peaceful sociability that night, and something had damped Mrs. Amworth's usual high spirits. She had no gusto for her piquet, and left after a couple of games. Urcombe had been silent too, indeed he hardly spoke again till she departed.

"That was unfortunate," he said, "for the outbreak of—of a very mysterious disease, let us call it, took place at Peshawar where she and her husband were. And——"

"Well?" I asked.

"He was one of the victims of it," said he. "Naturally I had quite forgotten that when I spoke."

The summer was unreasonably hot and rainless, and Maxley suffered much from drought, and also from a plague of big black night-flying gnats, the bite of which was very irritating and virulent. They came sailing in of an evening settling on one's skin so quietly that one perceived nothing till the sharp stab announced that one had been bitten. They did not bite the hands or face, but chose always the neck and throat for their feeding-ground, and most of us, as the poison spread, assumed a temporary goitre. Then about the middle of August appeared the first of those mysterious cases of illness which our local doctor attributed to the long-continued heat coupled with the bite of these venomous insects. The patient was a boy of sixteen or seventeen, the son of Mrs. Amworth's gardener, and the symptoms were

an anæmic pallor and a languid prostration, accompanied by great drowsiness and an abnormal appetite. He had, too on his throat two small punctures where, so Dr. Ross conjectured, one of these great gnats had bitten him. But the odd thing was that there was no swelling or inflammation round the place where he had been bitten. The heat at this time had begun to abate, but the cooler weather failed to restore him, and the boy, in spite of the quantity of good food which he so ravenously swallowed, wasted away to a skin-clad skeleton.

I met Dr. Ross in the street one afternoon about this time and in answer to my inquiries about his patient he said that he was afraid the boy was dying. The case, he confessed, completely puzzled him: some obscure form of pernicious anæmia was all he could suggest. But he wondered whether Mr. Urcombe would consent to see the boy, on the chance of his being able to throw some new light on the case, and since Urcombe was dining with me that night, I proposed to Dr. Ross to join us. He could not do this, but said he would look in later. When he came, Urcombe at once consented to put his skill at the other's disposal, and together they went off at once. Being thus shorn of my sociable evening, I telephoned to Mrs. Amworth to know if I might inflict myself on her for an hour. Her answer was a welcoming affirmative, and between piquet and music the hour lengthened itself into two. She spoke of the boy who was lying so desperately and mysteriously ill, and told me that she had often been to see him, taking him nourishing and delicate food. But to-day—and her kind eyes moistened as she spoke—she was afraid she had paid her last visit. Knowing the antipathy between her and Urcombe, I did not tell her that he had been called into consultation; and when I returned home she accompanied me to my door, for the sake of a breath of night air, and in order to borrow a magazine which contained an article on gardening which she wished to read.

"Ah, this delicious night air," she said, luxuriously sniffing in the coolness. "Night air and gardening are the great tonics. There is nothing so stimulating as bare contact with rich mother earth. You are never so fresh as when you have been grubbing in the soil—black hands, black nails, and boots covered with mud." She gave her great jovial laugh.

"I'm a glutton for air and earth," she said. "Positively

I look forward to death, for then I shall be buried and have the kind earth all round me. No leaden caskets for me—I have given explicit directions. But what shall I do about air? Well, I suppose one can't have everything. The magazine? A thousand thanks, I will faithfully return it. Good night: garden and keep your windows open, and you won't have anæmia."

"I always sleep with my windows open," said I.

I went straight up to my bedroom, of which one of the windows looks out over the street, and as I undressed I thought I heard voices talking outside not far away. But I paid no particular attention, put out my lights, and falling asleep plunged into the depths of a most horrible dream, distortedly suggested, no doubt, by my last words with Mrs. Amworth. I dreamed that I woke, and found that both my bedroom windows were shut. Half-suffocating I dreamed that I sprang out of bed, and went across to open them. The blind over the first was drawn down, and pulling it up I saw, with the indescribable horror of incipient nightmare, Mrs. Amworth's face suspended close to the pane in the darkness outside, nodding and smiling at me. Pulling down the blind again to keep that terror out, I rushed to the second window on the other side of the room, and there again was Mrs. Amworth's face. Then the panic came upon me in full blast; here was I suffocating in the airless room, and whichever window I opened Mrs. Amworth's face would float in, like those noiseless black gnats that bit before one was aware. The nightmare rose to screaming point, and with strangled yells I awoke to find my room cool and quiet with both windows open and blinds up and a half-moon high in its course, casting an oblong of tranquil light on the floor. But even when I was awake the horror persisted and I lay tossing and turning. I must have slept long before the nightmare seized me, for now it was nearly day, and soon in the east the drowsy eyelids of morning began to lift.

I was scarcely downstairs next morning—for after the dawn I slept late—when Urcombe rang up to know if he might see me immediately. He came in, grim and pre-occupied, and I noticed that he was pulling on a pipe that was not even filled.

"I want your help," he said, "and so I must tell you first of all what happened last night. I went round with the

little doctor to see his patient, and found him just alive, but scarcely more. I instantly diagnosed in my own mind what this anæmia, unaccountable by any other explanation, meant. The boy is the prey of a vampire."

He put his empty pipe on the breakfast-table, by which I had just sat down, and folded his arms, looking at me steadily from under his overhanging brows.

"Now about last night," he said. "I insisted that he should be moved from his father's cottage into my house. As we were carrying him on a stretcher, whom should we meet but Mrs. Amworth? She expressed shocked surprise that we were moving him. Now why do you think she did that?"

With a start of horror, as I remembered my dream that night before, I felt an idea come into my mind so preposterous and unthinkable that I instantly turned it out again.

"I haven't the smallest idea," I said.

"Then listen, while I tell you about what happened later. I put out all light in the room where the boy lay, and watched. One window was a little open, for I had forgotten to close it, and about midnight I heard something outside, trying apparently to push it farther open. I guessed who it was—yes, it was full twenty feet from the ground—and I peeped round the corner of the blind. Just outside was the face of Mrs. Amworth and her hand was on the frame of the window. Very softly I crept close, and then banged the window down, and I think I just caught the tip of one of her fingers."

"But it's impossible," I cried. "How could she be floating in the air like that? And what had she come for? Don't tell me such——"

Once more, with closer grip, the remembrance of my nightmare seized me.

"I am telling you what I saw," said he. "And all night long, until it was nearly day, she was fluttering outside like some terrible bat, trying to gain admittance. Not put together various things I have told you."

He began checking them off on his fingers.

"Number one," he said: "there was an outbreak of disease similar to that which this boy is suffering from at Peshawar, and her husband died of it. Number two: Mrs. Amworth protested against my moving the boy to my house

Number three: she, or the demon that inhabits her body, a creature powerful and deadly, tries to gain admittance, And add this, too: in mediæval times there was an epidemic of vampirism here at Maxley. The vampire, so the accounts run, was found to be Elizabeth Chaston . . . I see you remember Mrs. Amworth's maiden name. Finally, the boy is stronger this morning. He would certainly not have been alive if he had been visited again. And what do you make of it?"

There was a long silence, during which I found this incredible horror assuming the hues of reality.

"I have something to add," I said, "which may or may not bear on it. You say that the—the spectre went away shortly before dawn."

"Yes."

I told him of my dream, and he smiled grimly.

"Yes, you did well to awake," he said. "That warning came from your subconscious self, which never wholly slumbers, and cried out to you of deadly danger. For two reasons, then, you must help me: one to save others, the second to save yourself."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"I want you first of all to help me in watching this boy, and ensuring that she does not come near him. Eventually I want you to help me in tracking the thing down, in exposing and destroying it. It is not human: it is an incarnate fiend. What steps we shall have to take I don't yet know."

It was now eleven of the forenoon, and presently I went across to his house for a twelve-hour vigil while he slept, to come on duty again that night, so that for the next twenty-four hours either Urcombe or myself was always in the room where the boy, now getting stronger every hour, was lying. The day following was Saturday and a morning of brilliant, pellucid weather, and already when I went across to his house to resume my duty the stream of motors down to Brighton had begun. Simultaneously I saw Urcombe with a cheerful face, which boded good news of his patient, coming out of his house, and Mrs. Amworth, with a gesture of salutation to me and a basket in her hand, walking up the broad strip of grass which bordered the road. There we all three met. I noticed (and saw that Urcombe noticed it too) that one finger of her left hand was bandaged.

"Good morning to you both," said she. "And I hear your patient is doing well, Mr. Urcombe. I have come to bring him a bowl of jelly, and to sit with him for an hour. He and I are great friends. I am overjoyed at his recovery."

Urcombe paused a moment, as if making up his mind, and then shot out a pointing finger at her.

"I forbid that," he said. "You shall not sit with him or see him. And you know the reason as well as I do."

I have never seen so horrible a change pass over a human face as that which now blanched hers to the colour of a grey mist. She put up her hand as if to shield herself from that pointing finger, which drew the sign of the cross in the air, and shrank back cowering on to the road. There was a wild hoot from a horn, a grinding of brakes, a shout—too late—from a passing car, and one long scream suddenly cut short. Her body rebounded from the roadway after the first wheel had gone over it, and the second followed. It lay there, quivering and twitching, and was still.

She was buried three days afterwards in the cemetery outside Maxley, in accordance with the wishes she had told me that she had devised about her interment, and the shock which her sudden and awful death had caused to the little community began by degrees to pass off. To two people only, Urcombe and myself, the horror of it was mitigated from the first by the nature of the relief that her death brought; but, naturally enough, we kept our own counsel, and no hint of what greater horror had been thus averted was ever let slip. But, oddly enough, so it seemed to me, he was still not satisfied about something in connection with her, and would give no answer to my questions on the subject. Then as the days of a tranquil mellow September and the October that followed began to drop away like the leaves of the yellowing trees, his uneasiness relaxed. But before the entry of November the seeming tranquillity broke into hurricane.

I had been dining one night at the far end of the village, and about eleven o'clock was walking home again. The moon was of an unusual brilliance, rendering all that it shone on as distinct as in some etching. I had just come opposite the house which Mrs. Amworth had occupied, where there was a board up telling that it was to let, when I heard the click of her front gate, and next moment I saw, with a sudden chill and quaking of my very spirit, that she

stood there. Her profile, vividly illuminated, was turned to me, and I could not be mistaken in my identification of her. She appeared not to see me (indeed the shadow of the yew hedge in front of her garden enveloped me in its blackness) and she went swiftly across the road, and entered the gate of the house directly opposite. There I lost sight of her completely.

My breath was coming in short pants as if I had been running—and now indeed I ran, with fearful backward glances, along the hundred yards that separated me from my house and Urcombe's. It was to his that my flying steps took me, and next minute I was within.

"What have you come to tell me?" he asked. "Or shall I guess?"

"You can't guess," said I.

"No; it's no guess. She has come back and you have seen her. Tell me about it."

I gave him my story.

"That's Major Pearsall's house," he said. "Come back with me there at once."

"But what can we do?" I asked.

"I've no idea. That's what we have got to find out."

A minute later, we were opposite the house. When I had passed it before, it was all dark; now lights gleamed from a couple of windows upstairs. Even as we faced it, the front door opened, and next moment Major Pearsall emerged from the gate. He saw us and stopped.

"I'm on my way to Dr. Ross," he said quickly. "My wife has been taken suddenly ill. She had been in bed an hour when I came upstairs, and I found her white as a ghost and utterly exhausted. She had been to sleep, it seemed— But you will excuse me."

"One moment, Major," said Urcombe. "Was there any mark on her throat?"

"How did you guess that?" said he. "There was: one of those beastly gnats must have bitten her twice there. She was streaming with blood."

"And there's someone with her?" asked Urcombe.

"Yes, I roused her maid."

He went off, and Urcombe turned to me. "I know now what we have to do," he said. "Change your clothes, and I'll join you at your house."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'll tell you on our way. We're going to the cemetery."

He carried a pick, a shovel, and a screwdriver when he rejoined me, and wore round his shoulders a long coil of rope. As we walked, he gave me the outlines of the ghastly hour that lay before us.

"What I have to tell you," he said, "will seem to you now too fantastic for credence, but before dawn we shall see whether it outstrips reality. By a most fortunate happening you saw the spectre, the astral body, whatever you choose to call it, of Mrs. Amworth, going on its grisly business and therefore, beyond doubt, the vampire spirit which abode in her during life animates her again in death. That is not exceptional—indeed, all these weeks since her death I have been expecting it. If I am right, we shall find her body undecayed and untouched by corruption."

"But she has been dead nearly two months," said I.

"If she had been dead two years it would still be so, if the vampire has possession of her. So remember: whatever you see done, it will be done not to her, who in the natural course would now be feeding the grasses above her grave, but to a spirit of untold evil and malignancy, which gives a phantom life to her body."

"But what shall I see done?" said I.

"I will tell you. We know that now, at this moment the vampire clad in her mortal semblance is out; dining out. But it must get back before dawn, and it will pass into the material form that lies in her grave. We must wait for that, and then with your help I shall dig up her body. If I am right, you will look on her as she was in life, with the full vigour of the dreadful nutriment she has received pulsing in her veins. And then, when dawn has come, and the vampire cannot leave the lair of her body, I shall strike her with this"—and he pointed to his pick—"through the heart, and she, who comes to life again only with the animation the fiend gives her, she and her hellish partner will be dead indeed. Then we must bury her again, delivered at last."

We had come to the cemetery, and in the brightness of the moonshine there was no difficulty in identifying her grave. It lay some twenty yards from the small chapel, in the porch of which, obscured by shadow, we concealed ourselves.

From there we had a clear and open sight of the grave, and now we must wait till its infernal visitor returned home. The night was warm and windless, yet even if a freezing wind had been raging I think I should have felt nothing of it, so intense was my preoccupation as to what the night and dawn would bring. There was a bell in the turret of the chapel that struck the quarters of the hour, and it amazed me to find how swiftly the chimes succeeded one another.

The moon had long set, but a twilight of stars shone in a clear sky, when five o'clock of the morning sounded from the turret. A few minutes more passed, and then I felt Urcombe's hand softly nudging me; and looking out in the direction of his pointing finger, I saw that the form of a woman, tall and large in build, was approaching from the right. Noiselessly, with a motion more of gliding and floating than walking, she moved across the cemetery to the grave which was the centre of our observation. She moved round it as if to be certain of its identity, and for a moment stood directly facing us. In the greyness to which now my eyes had grown accustomed, I could easily see her face, and recognise its features.

She drew her hand across her mouth as if wiping it, and broke into a chuckle of such laughter as made my hair stir on my head. Then she leaped on to the grave, holding her hands high above her head, and inch by inch disappeared into the earth. Urcombe's hand was laid on my arm, in an injunction to keep still, but now he removed it.

"Come," he said.

With pick and shovel and rope we went to the grave. The earth was light and sandy, and soon after six struck we have delved down to the coffin lid. With his pick he loosened the earth round it, and, adjusting the rope through the handles by which it had been lowered, we tried to raise it. This was a long and laborious business, and the light had begun to herald day in the east before we had it out, and lying by the side of the grave. With his screwdriver he loosed the fastenings of the lid, and slid it aside, and standing there we looked on the face of Mrs. Amworth. The eyes, once closed in death, were open, the cheeks were flushed with colour, the red, full-lipped mouth seemed to smile.

"One blow and it is all over," he said. "You need not look."

Even as he spoke he took up the pick again, and, laying the point of it on her left breast, measured his distance. And though I knew what was coming I could not look away . . .

He grasped the pick in both hands, raised it an inch or two for the taking of his aim, and then with full force brought it down on her breast. A fountain of blood, though she had been dead so long, spouted high in the air, falling with the thud of a heavy splash over the shroud, and simultaneously from those red lips came one long, appalling cry, swelling up like some hooting siren, and dying away again. With that, instantaneous as a lightning flash, came the touch of corruption on her face, the colour of it faded to ash, the plump cheeks fell in, the mouth dropped.

"Thank God, that's over," said he, and without pause slipped the coffin lid back into its place.

Day was coming fast now, and, working like men possessed, we lowered the coffin into its place again, and shovelled the earth over it. . . . The birds were busy with their earliest pipings as we went back to Maxley.

JEROME K. JEROME

The Dancing-Partner

THE DANCING-PARTNER

"THIS story," commenced MacShaugnassy, "comes from Furtwangen, a small town in the Black Forest. There lived there a very wonderful old fellow named Nicholas Geibel. His business was the making of mechanical toys, at which work he had acquired an almost European reputation. He made rabbits that would emerge from the heart of a cabbage, flop their ears, smooth their whiskers, and disappear again; cats that would wash their faces, and mew so naturally that dogs would mistake them for real cats, and fly at them; dolls, with phonographs concealed within them, that would raise their hats and say, 'Good morning; how do you do?' and some that would even sing a song.

"But he was something more than a mere mechanic; he was an artist. His work was with him a hobby, almost a passion. His shop was filled with all manner of strange things that never would, or could, be sold—things he had made for the pure love of making them. He had contrived a mechanical donkey that would trot for two hours by means of stored electricity, and trot, too, much faster than the live article, and with less need for exertion on the part of the driver; a bird that would shoot up into the air, fly round and round in a circle, and drop to earth at the exact spot from where it started; a skeleton that, supported by an upright iron bar, would dance a hornpipe; a life-size lady doll that could play the fiddle; and a gentleman with a hollow inside who could smoke a pipe and drink more lager beer than any three average German students put together, which is saying much.

"Indeed, it was the belief of the town that old Geibel could make a man capable of doing everything that a respectable man need want to do. One day he made a man who did too much, and it came about in this way:

"Young Doctor Follen had a baby, and the baby had a

birthday. Its first birthday put Doctor Follen's household into somewhat of a flurry, but on the occasion of its second birthday, Mrs. Doctor Follen gave a ball in honour of the event. Old Geibel and his daughter Olga were among the guests.

"During the afternoon of the next day some three or four of Olga's bosom friends, who had also been present at the ball, dropped in to have a chat about it. They naturally fell to discussing the men, and to criticising their dancing. Old Geibel was in the room, but he appeared to be absorbed in his newspaper, and the girls took no notice of him.

"'There seem to be fewer men who can dance at every ball you go to,' said one of the girls.

"'Yes, and don't the ones who can give themselves airs,' said another; 'they make quite a favour of asking you.'

"'And how stupidly they talk,' added a third. 'They always say exactly the same things: "How charming you are looking to-night." "Do you often go to Vienna? Oh, you should, it's delightful." "What a charming dress you have on." "What a warm day it has been." "Do you like Wagner?" I do wish they'd think of something new.'

"'Oh, I never mind how they talk,' said a fourth. 'If a man dances well he may be a fool for all I care.'

"'He generally is,' slipped in a thin girl, rather spitefully.

"'I go to a ball to dance,' continued the previous speaker, not noticing the interruption. 'All I ask of a partner is that he shall hold me firmly, take me round steadily, and not get tired before I do.'

"'A clockwork figure would be the thing for you,' said the girl who had interrupted.

"'Bravo!' cried one of the others, clapping her hands, 'what a capital idea!'

"'What's a capital idea?' they asked.

"'Why, a clockwork dancer, or, better still, one that would go by electricity and never run down.'

"The girls took up the idea with enthusiasm.

"'Oh, what a lovely partner he would make,' said one; 'he would never kick you, or tread on your toes.'

"'Or tear your dress,' said another.

"'Or get out of step.'

"'Or get giddy and lean on you.'

"'And he would never want to mop his face with his

handkerchief. I do hate to see a man do that after every dance.'

" 'And wouldn't want to spend the whole evening in the supper room.'

" 'Why, with a phonograph inside him to grind out all the stock remarks, you would not be able to tell him from a real man,' said the girl who had first suggested the idea.

" 'Oh, yes, you would,' said the thin girl, 'he would be so much nicer.'

" Old Geibel had laid down his paper, and was listening with both his ears. On one of the girls glancing in his direction, however, he hurriedly hid himself again behind it.

" After the girls were gone, he went into his workshop, where Olga heard him walking up and down, and every now and then chuckling to himself; and that night he talked to her a good deal about dancing and dancing men—asked what they usually said and did—what dances were most popular—what steps were gone through, with many other questions bearing on the subject.

" Then for a couple of weeks he kept much to his factory, and was very thoughtful and busy, though prone at unexpected moments to break into a quiet low laugh, as if enjoying a joke that nobody else knew of.

" A month later another ball took place, in Furtwangen. On this occasion it was given by old Wenzel, the wealthy timber merchant, to celebrate his niece's betrothal, and Geibel and his daughter were again among the invited.

" When the hour arrived to set out, Olga sought her father. Not finding him in the house, she tapped at the door of his workshop. He appeared in his shirt-sleeves, looking hot but radiant.

" 'Don't wait for me,' he said, 'you go on, I'll follow you. I've got something to finish.'

" As she turned to obey he called after her, 'Tell them I'm going to bring a young man with me—such a nice young man, and an excellent dancer. All the girls will like him.' Then he laughed and closed the door.

" Her father generally kept his doings secret from everybody, but she had a pretty shrewd suspicion of what he had been planning, and so, to a certain extent, was able to prepare the guests for what was coming. Anticipation ran high, and the arrival of the famous mechanist was eagerly awaited.

"At length the sound of wheels was heard outside, followed by a great commotion in the passage, and old Wenzel himself, his jolly face red with excitement and suppressed laughter, burst into the room and announced in stentorian tones :

" 'Herr Geibel—and a friend.'

"Herr Geibel and his 'friend' entered, greeted with shouts of laughter and applause, and advanced to the centre of the room.

" 'Allow me, ladies and gentlemen,' said Herr Geibel, 'to introduce you to my friend, Lieutenant Fritz. Fritz, my dear fellow, bow to the ladies and gentlemen.'

"Geibel placed his hand encouragingly on Fritz's shoulder, and the lieutenant bowed low, accompanying the action with a harsh clicking noise in his throat, unpleasantly suggestive of a death rattle. But that was only a detail.

" 'He walks a little stiffly' (old Geibel took his arm and walked him forward a few steps. He certainly did walk stiffly), 'but then, walking is not his forte. He is essentially a dancing man. I have only been able to teach him the waltz as yet, but at that he is faultless. Come, which of you ladies may I introduce him to as a partner. He keeps perfect time ; he never gets tired ; he won't kick you or tread on your dress ; he will hold you as firmly as you like, and go as quickly or as slowly as you please ; he never gets giddy ; and he is full of conversation. Come, speak up for yourself, my boy.'

"The old gentleman twisted one of the buttons at the back of his coat, and immediately Fritz opened his mouth, and in thin tones that appeared to proceed from the back of his head, remarked suddenly, 'May I have the pleasure ?' and then shut his mouth again with a snap.

"That Lieutenant Fritz had made a strong impression on the company was undoubted, yet none of the girls seemed inclined to dance with him. They looked askance at his waxen face, with its staring eyes and fixed smile, and shuddered. At last old Geibel came to the girl who had conceived the idea.

" 'It is your own suggestion, carried out to the letter,' said Geibel, 'an electric dancer. You owe it to the gentleman to give him a trial.'

"She was a bright, saucy little girl, fond of a frolic. Her host added his entreaties, and she consented.

"Herr Geibel fixed the figure to her. Its right arm was screwed round her waist, and held her firmly; its delicately-jointed left hand was made to fasten itself upon her right. The old toymaker showed her how to regulate its speed, and how to stop it, and release herself.

"'It will take you round in a complete circle,' he explained; 'be careful that no one knocks against you, and alters its course.'

"The music struck up. Old Geibel put the current in motion, and Annette and her strange partner began to dance.

"For a while everyone stood watching them. The figure performed its purpose admirably. Keeping perfect time and step, and holding its little partner tight clasped in an unyielding embrace, it revolved steadily, pouring forth at the same time a constant flow of squeaky conversation, broken by brief intervals of grinding silence.

"'How charming you are looking to-night,' it remarked in its thin, far-away voice. 'What a lovely day it has been. Do you like dancing? How well our steps agree. You will give me another, won't you? Oh, don't be so cruel. What a charming gown you have on. Isn't waltzing delightful? I could go on dancing for ever—with you. Have you had supper?'

"As she grew more familiar with the uncanny creature, the girl's nervousness wore off, and she entered into the fun of the thing.

"'Oh, he's just lovely,' she cried, laughing, 'I could go on dancing with him all my life.'

"Couple after couple now joined them, and soon all the dancers in the room were whirling round behind them. Nicholas Geibel stood looking on, beaming with childish delight at his success.

"Old Wenzel approached him, and whispered something in his ear. Geibel laughed and nodded, and the two worked their way quietly towards the door.

"'This is the young people's house to-night,' said Wenzel, as soon as they were outside; 'you and I will have a quiet pipe and a glass of hock, over in the counting-house.'

"Meanwhile the dancing grew more fast and furious. Little Annette loosened the screw regulating her partner's rate of progress, and the figure flew round with her swifter and swifter. Couple after couple dropped out exhausted,

but they only went the faster, till at length they remained dancing alone.

"Madder and madder became the waltz. The music lagged behind: the musicians, unable to keep pace, ceased, and sat staring. The younger guests applauded, but the older faces began to grow anxious.

"'Hadn't you better stop, dear,' said one of the women, 'you'll make yourself so tired.'

"But Annette did not answer.

"'I believe she's fainted,' cried out a girl who had caught sight of her face as it was swept by.

"One of the men sprang forward and clutched at the figure, but its impetus threw him down on to the floor, where its steel-cased feet laid bare his cheek. The thing evidently did not intend to part with its prize easily.

"Had anyone retained a cool head, the figure, one cannot help thinking, might easily have been stopped. Two or three men acting in concert might have lifted it bodily off the floor, or have jammed it into a corner. But few human heads are capable of remaining cool under excitement. Those who are not present think how stupid must have been those who were; those who are reflect afterwards how simple it would have been to do this, that, or the other, if only they had thought of it at the time.

"The women grew hysterical. The men shouted contradictory directions to one another. Two of them made a bungling rush at the figure, which had the result of forcing it out of its orbit in the centre of the room, and sending it crashing against the walls and furniture. A stream of blood showed itself down the girl's white frock, and followed her along the floor. The affair was becoming horrible. The women rushed screaming from the room. The men followed them.

"One sensible suggestion was made: 'Find Geibel--- fetch Geibel.'

"No one had noticed him leave the room, no one knew where he was. A party went in search of him. The others, too unnerved to go back into the ball-room, crowded outside the door and listened. They could hear the steady whir of the wheels upon the polished floor as the thing spun round and round; the dull thud as every now and again it dashed itself and its burden against some opposing object and ricocheted off in a new direction.

"And everlastingly it talked in that thin ghastly voice, repeating over and over the same formula: 'How charming you are looking to-night. What a lovely day it has been. Oh, don't be so cruel. I could go on dancing for ever—with you. Have you had supper?'"

"Of course they sought for Geibel everywhere but where he was. They looked in every room in the house, then they rushed off in a body to his own place, and spent precious minutes in waking up his deaf old housekeeper. At last it occurred to one of the party that Wenzel was missing also, and then the idea of the counting-house across the yard presented itself to them, and there they found him.

"He rose up, very pale, and followed them; and he and old Wenzel forced their way through the crowd of guests gathered outside, and entered the room, and locked the door behind them.

"From within there came the muffled sound of low voices and quick steps, followed by a confused scuffling noise, then silence, then the low voices again.

"After a time the door opened, and those near it pressed forward to enter, but old Wenzel's broad shoulders barred the way.

"'I want you—and you, Bekler,' he said, addressing a couple of the elder men. His voice was calm, but his face was deadly white. 'The rest of you, please go—get the women away as quickly as you can.'

"From that day old Nicholas Geibel confined himself to the making of mechanical rabbits, and cats that mewed and washed their faces."

MAURICE BARING

Venus

VENUS

JOHAN FLETCHER was an over-worked minor official in a Government office. He lived a lonely life, and had done so ever since he had been a boy. At school he had mixed little with his fellow-schoolboys, and he took no interest in the things that interested them—that is to say, games.

On the other hand, although he was what is called "good at work," and did his lessons with facility and speed, he was not a literary boy, and did not care for books. He was drawn towards machinery of all kinds, and spent his spare time in dabbling in scientific experiments or in watching trains go by on the Great Western line. Once he blew off his eyebrows while making some experiment with explosive chemicals; his hands were always smudged with dark, mysterious stains, and his room was like that of a medieval alchemist, littered with retorts, bottles and test-tubes. Before leaving school he invented a flying machine (heavier than air), and an unsuccessful attempt to start it on the high road caused him to be the victim of much chaff and ridicule.

When he left school he went to Oxford. His life there was as lonely as it had been at school. The dirty, untidy, ink-stained and chemical-stained little boy grew up into a tall, lank, slovenly dressed man, who kept entirely to himself, not because he cherished any dislike or disdain for his fellow-creatures, but because he seemed to be entirely absorbed in his own thoughts and isolated from the world by a barrier of dreams.

He did well at Oxford, and when he went down he passed high into the Civil Service and became a clerk in a Government office. There he kept as much to himself as ever. He did his work rapidly and well, for this man, who seemed so slovenly in his person, had an accurate mind, and was what was called a good clerk, although his incurable

absent-mindedness once or twice caused him to forget certain matters of importance.

His fellow-clerks treated him as a crank and as a joke, but none of them, try as they would, could get to know him or win his confidence. They used to wonder what Fletcher did with his spare time, what were his pursuits, what were his hobbies, if he had any. They suspected that Fletcher had some hobby of an engrossing kind, since in everyday life he was like a man who is walking in his sleep, and who acts mechanically and automatically. Somewhere else, they thought, in some other circumstances, he must surely wake up and take a living interest in somebody or in something.

Yet had they followed him home to his small room in Canterbury Mansions they would have been astonished. For when he returned from the office after a hard day's work he would do nothing more engrossing than slowly to turn over the leaves of a book in which there were elaborate drawings and diagrams of locomotives and other engines. And on Sunday he would take a train to one of the large junctions and spend the whole day in watching express trains go past, and in the evening would return again to London.

One day after he had returned from the office somewhat earlier than usual, he was telephoned for. He had no telephone in his own room, but he could use a public telephone which was attached to the building.

He went into the small box, but found on reaching the telephone that he had been cut off by the exchange. He imagined that he had been rung up by the office, so he asked to be given their number.

As he did so his eye caught an advertisement which was hung over the telephone. It was an elaborate design in black and white, pointing out the merits of a particular kind of soap called the Venus: a classical lady, holding a looking-glass in one hand and a cake of this invaluable soap in the other, was standing in a sphere surrounded by pointed rays, which was no doubt intended to represent the most brilliant of the planets . . .

Fletcher sat down on the stool and took the receiver in his hand. As he did so he had for one second the impression that the floor underneath him gave way and that he was falling down a precipice. But before he had time to realise

what was happening the sensation of falling left him; he shook himself as though he had been asleep, and for one moment a faint recollection as though of the dreams of the night twinkled in his mind, and vanished beyond all possibility of recall. He said to himself that he had a long and curious dream, and he knew that it was too late to remember what it had been about. Then he opened his eyes wide and looked round him.

He was standing on the slope of a hill. At his feet there was a green moss, very soft to tread on. It was sprinkled here and there with light red, wax-like flowers such as he had never seen before. He was standing in an open space; beneath him there was a plain covered with what seemed to be gigantic mushrooms, much taller than a man. Above him rose a mass of vegetation, and over all this was a dense, heavy, streaming cloud faintly glimmering with a white, silvery light which seemed to be beyond it.

He walked towards the vegetation, and soon found himself in the middle of a wood, or rather of a jungle. Tangled plants grew on every side; large hanging creepers with great blue flowers hung downwards. There was a profound stillness in this wood; there were no birds singing and he heard not the slightest rustle in the rich undergrowth. It was oppressively hot, and the air was full of a pungent, aromatic sweetness. He felt as though he were in a hothouse full of gardenias and stephanotis. At the same time the atmosphere of the place was pleasant to him. It was neither strange nor disagreeable. He felt at home in this green, shimmering jungle, in this hot, aromatic twilight, as though he had lived here all his life.

He walked mechanically onwards as if he were going to a definite spot of which he knew. He walked fast, but in spite of the oppressive atmosphere and the thickness of the growth he grew neither hot nor out of breath; on the contrary, he took pleasure in the motion, and the stifling, sweet air seemed to invigorate him.

He walked steadily on for over three hours, choosing his way nicely, avoiding certain places and seeking others, following a definite path and making for a definite goal. During all this time the stillness continued unbroken, nor did he meet a single living thing, either bird or beast.

After he had been walking for what seemed to him several

hours, the vegetation grew thinner, the jungle less dense, and from a more or less open space in it he seemed to discern what might have been a mountain entirely submerged in a mass of heavy grey cloud. He sat down on the green stuff which was like grass and yet was not grass, at the edge of the open space when he got this view, and quite naturally he picked from the boughs of an overhanging tree a large red, juicy fruit, and ate it. Then he said to himself, he knew not why, that he must not waste time, but must be moving on.

He took a path to the right of him, and descended the sloping jungle with big, buoyant strides, almost running; he knew the way as though he had been down that path a thousand times. He knew that in a few moments he would reach a whole hanging garden of red flowers, and he knew that when he had reached this he must again turn to the right. It was as he thought: the red flowers came soon into sight. He turned sharply, and through the thinning greenery he caught sight of an open plain where more mushrooms grew. But the plain was as yet a great way off, and the mushrooms seemed quite small.

"I shall get there in time," he said to himself, and walked steadily on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. It was evening by the time he reached the edge of the plain: everything was growing dark. The endless vapours and the high banks of cloud in which the whole of this world was sunk grew dimmer and dimmer.

In front of him was an empty level space, and about two miles farther on the huge mushrooms stood out, tall and wide, like the monuments of some prehistoric age. And underneath them on the soft carpet there seemed to move a myriad vague and shadowy forms.

"I shall get there in time," he thought. He walked on for another half-hour, and by this time the tall mushrooms were quite close to him, and he could see moving underneath them, distinctly now, green, living creatures like huge caterpillars, with glowing eyes. They moved slowly and did not seem to interfere with each other in any way. Farther off, and beyond them, there was a broad and endless plain of high green stalks like ears of green wheat or millet, only taller and thinner.

He ran on, and now at his very feet, right in front of him,

the green caterpillars were moving. They were as big as leopards. As he drew nearer they seemed to make way for him, and to gather themselves into groups under the thick stems of the mushrooms. He walked along the pathway they made for him, under the shadow of the broad, sunshade-like roofs of these gigantic growths.

It was almost dark now, yet he had no doubt or difficulty as to finding his way. He was making for the green plain beyond. The ground was dense with caterpillars; they were as plentiful as ants in an ant's nest, and yet they never seemed to interfere with each other or with him; they instinctively made way for him, nor did they appear to notice him in any way. He felt neither surprise nor wonder at their presence.

It grew quite dark; the only lights which were in this world came from the twinkling eyes of the moving figures, which shone like little stars. The night was no whit cooler than the day. The atmosphere was as steamy, as dense, and as aromatic as before. He walked on and on, feeling no trace of fatigue or hunger, and every now and then he said to himself, "I shall be there in time." The plain was flat and level, and covered the whole way with mushrooms, whose roofs met and shut out from him the sight of the dark sky.

At last he came to the end of the plain of mushrooms and reached the high green stalks he had been making for. Beyond the dark clouds a silver glimmer had begun once more to show itself. "I am just in time," he said to himself; "the night is over, the sun is rising."

At that moment there was a great whir in the air, and from out of the green stalks rose a flight of millions and millions of enormous broad-winged butterflies of every hue and description—silver, gold, purple, brown, and blue. Some with dark and velvety wings like the Purple Emperor, or the Red Admiral, others diaphanous and iridescent as dragon-flies. Others again like vast, soft and silvery moths. They rose from every part of that green plain of stalks, they filled the sky, and then soared upwards and disappeared into the silvery cloudland.

Fletcher was about to leap forward when he heard a voice in his ear saying:

"Are you 6493 Victoria? You are talking to the Home Office."

II

As soon as Fletcher heard the voice of the office messenger through the telephone he instantly realised his surroundings, and the strange experience he had just gone through, which had seemed so long and which in reality had been so brief, left little more impression on him than that which remains with a man who has been immersed in a brown study or who has been staring at something, say a poster in the street, and has not noticed the passage of time.

The next day he returned to his work at the office, and his fellow-clerks, during the whole of the next week, noticed that he was more zealous and more painstaking than ever.

On the other hand, his periodical fits of abstraction grew more frequent and more pronounced. On one occasion he took a paper to the Head of the Department for signature, and after it had been signed, instead of removing it from the table, he remained staring in front of him, and it was not until the Head of the Department had called him three times loudly by name that he took any notice and regained possession of his faculties.

As these fits of absent-mindedness grew to be somewhat severely commented on, he consulted a doctor, who told him that what he needed was change of air, and advised him to spend his Sundays at Brighton or at some other bracing and exhilarating spot. Fletcher did not take the doctor's advice, but continued spending his spare time as he did before—that is to say, in going to some big junction and watching the express trains go by all day long.

One day while he was thus employed—it was Sunday, in August of 19—, when the Egyptian Exhibition was attracting great crowds of visitors—and sitting, as was his habit, on a bench on the centre platform of Slough Station, he noticed an Indian pacing up and down the platform, who every now and then stopped and regarded him with peculiar interest, hesitating as though he wished to speak to him.

Presently the Indian came and sat down on the same bench, and after having sat there in silence for some minutes he at last made a remark about the heat.

"Yes," said Fletcher, "it is trying, especially for people

like myself, who have to remain in London during these months."

"You are in an office, no doubt," said the Indian.

"Yes," said Fletcher.

"And you are no doubt hard worked."

"Our hours are not long," Fletcher replied, "and I should not complain of overwork if I did not happen to suffer from—well, I don't know what it is, but I suppose they would call it nerves."

"Yes," said the Indian, "I could see that by your eyes."

"I am a prey to sudden fits of abstraction," said Fletcher; "they are growing upon me. Sometimes in the office I forget where I am altogether for a space of about two or three minutes; people are beginning to notice it and to talk about it. I have been to a doctor, and he said I needed change of air. I shall have my leave in about a month's time, and then perhaps I shall get some change of air, but I doubt if it will do me any good. But these fits are annoying, and once something quite uncanny seemed to happen to me."

The Indian showed great interest and asked for further details concerning this strange experience, and Fletcher told him all that he could recall—for the memory of it was already dimmed—of what had happened when he had telephoned that night.

The Indian was thoughtful for a while after hearing this tale. At last he said, "I am not a doctor, I am not even what you call a quack doctor—I am a mere conjurer, and I gain my living by conjuring tricks and fortune-telling at the exhibition which is going on in London. But although I am a poor man and an ignorant man, I have an inkling, a few sparks in me of the ancient knowledge, and I know what is the matter with you."

"What is it?" asked Fletcher.

"You have the power, or something has the power," said the Indian, "of detaching you from your actual body, and your astral body has been in another planet. By your description I think it must be the planet Venus. It may happen to you again, and for a longer period—for a very much longer period."

"Is there anything I can do to prevent it?" asked Fletcher.

"Nothing," said the Indian. "You can try change of

air if you like, but," he said with a smile, "I do not think it will do you much good."

At that moment a train came in, and the Indian said good-bye and jumped into it.

On the next day, which was Monday, when Fletcher got to the office, it was necessary for him to use the telephone.

No sooner had he taken off the receiver than he vividly recalled the minute details of the evening he had telephoned, when the strange experience had come to him. The advertisement of Venus soap that had hung in the telephone box in his house appeared distinctly before him, and as he thought of that he once more experienced a falling sensation which lasted only a fraction of a second, and rubbing his eyes he awoke to find himself in the tepid atmosphere of a green and humid world.

This time he was not near the wood, but on the seashore. In front of him was a grey sea, smooth as oil and clouded with steaming vapours, and behind him the wide green plain stretched into a cloudy distance. He could discern, faint on the far-off horizon, the shadowy forms of the gigantic mushroom-rooms which he knew; and on the level plain, which reached the sea beach, but not so far off as the mushroom-rooms, he could plainly see the huge green caterpillars moving slowly and lazily in an endless herd.

The sea was breaking on the sand with a faint moan. But almost at once he became aware of another sound, which came he knew not whence, and which was familiar to him. It was a low whistling noise, and it seemed to come from the sky.

At that moment Fletcher was seized by an unaccountable panic. He was afraid of something; he did not know what it was, but he knew, he felt absolutely certain, that some danger, no vague calamity, no distant misfortune, but some definite physical danger was hanging over him and quite close to him—something from which it would be necessary to run away, and to run fast in order to save his life. And yet there was no sign of danger visible, for in front of him was the motionless oily sea, and behind him was the empty and silent plain.

It was then he noticed that the caterpillars were fast disappearing, as if into the earth: he was too far off to make out how.

He began to run along the coast. He ran as fast as he could, but he dared not look round. He ran back from the coast along the plain, from which a white mist was rising. By this time every single caterpillar had disappeared. The whistling noise continued and grew louder.

At last he reached the wood and bounded on, trampling down long trailing grasses and tangled weeds through the thick, muggy gloom of those endless aisles of jungle. He came to a somewhat open space where there was the trunk of a tree larger than the others; it stood by itself and disappeared into the tangle of creepers above. He thought he would climb the tree, but the trunk was too wide, and his efforts failed. He stood by the tree trembling and panting with fear. He could not hear a sound, but he felt that the danger, whatever it was, was at hand.

It grew darker and darker. It was night in the forest. He stood paralysed with terror; he felt as though bound hand and foot, but there was nothing to be done except to wait until his invisible enemy should choose to inflict his will on him and achieve his doom. And yet the agony of this suspense was so terrible that he felt that if it lasted much longer something must inevitably break inside him . . . and just as he was thinking that eternity could not be so long as the moments he was passing through, a blessed unconsciousness came over him. He woke from this state to find himself face to face with one of the office messengers, who said to him that he been given his number two or three times but had taken no notice of it.

Fletcher executed his commission and then went upstairs to his office. His fellow-clerks at once asked what had happened to him, for he was looking white.

He said that he had a headache and was not feeling quite himself, but made no further explanation.

This last experience changed the whole tenor of his life. When fits of abstraction had occurred to him before he had not troubled about them, and after his first strange experience he had felt only vaguely interested; but now it was a different matter. He was consumed with dread lest the thing should occur again.

He did not want to get back to that green world and that oily sea; he did not want to hear the whistling noise, nor to be pursued by an invisible enemy. So much did the dread

of this weigh on him that he refused to go to the telephone lest the act of telephoning should set alight in his mind the train of associations and bring his thoughts back to his dreadful experience.

Shortly after this he went for leave, and following the doctor's advice he spent it by the sea. During all this time he was perfectly well, and was not once troubled by his curious fits. He returned to London in the autumn refreshed and well.

On the first day that he went to the office a friend of his telephoned to him. When he was told that the line was being held for him he hesitated, but at last he went down to the telephone office.

He remained away twenty minutes. Finally his prolonged absence was noticed, and he was sent for. He was found in the telephone room stiff and unconscious, having fallen forward on the telephone desk. His face was quite white, and his eyes wide open and glazed with an expression of piteous and harrowing terror. When they tried to revive him their efforts were in vain. A doctor was sent for, and he said that Fletcher had died of heart disease.

ERNEST BRAMAH

The Story of Yung Chang

THE STORY OF YUNG CHANG

IT was during the reign of the enlightened Emperor Tsing Nung that there lived at a village near Honan a wealthy and avaricious maker of idols named Ti Hung. So skilful had he become in the making of clay idols that his fame had spread for many li around, and idol-sellers from all the neighbouring villages, and even from the towns, came to him for their stock.

No other idol-maker between Honan and Nankin employed so many clay-gatherers or so many modellers; yet, with all his riches, his avarice increased till at length he employed men whom he called "agents" and "travellers," who went from house to house selling his idols and extolling his virtues in verses composed by the most illustrious poets of the day. He did this in order that he might turn into his own pocket the full price of the idols, grudging those who would otherwise have sold them the few cash which they would make. Owing to this he had enemies, and his army of travellers made him still more; for they were more rapacious than the scorpion, and more obstinate than the ox. Indeed, there is still the proverb, "With honey it is possible to soften the heart of the he-goat; but a blow from an iron cleaver is taken as a mark of welcome by an agent of Ti Hung."

So that people barred the doors at their approach, and even hung out signs of death and mourning.

Now, among all his travellers there was none more successful, more abandoned, and more valuable to Ti Hung than Li Ting. So depraved was Li Ting that he was never known to visit the tombs of his ancestors; indeed, it was said that he had been heard to mock their venerable memories, and that he had jestingly offered to sell them to anyone who should chance to be without ancestors of his own. This objectionable person would call at the houses of the most illustrious mandarins, and would command the slaves to

carry to their masters his tablets, on which were inscribed his name and his virtues. Reaching their presence he would salute them with the greeting of an equal, "How is your stomach?" and then proceed to exhibit samples of his wares, greatly overrating their value. "Behold!" he would exclaim, "is not this elegantly moulded idol worthy of the place of honour in this sumptuous mansion which my presence defiles to such an extent that twelve basins of rose water will not remove the stain? Are not its eyes more delicate than the most select of almonds? and is not its stomach rounder than the cupolas upon the high temple at Pekin?"

"Yet, in spite of its perfections, it is not worthy of the acceptance of so distinguished a mandarin, and therefore I will accept in return the quarter-tael, which, indeed, is less than my illustrious master gives for the clay alone."

In this manner Li Ting disposed of many idols at high rates, and thereby endeared himself so much to the avaricious heart of Ti Hung that he promised him his beautiful daughter Ning in marriage.

Ning was indeed very lovely. Her eyelashes were like the finest willow twigs that grow in the marshes by the Yang-tse-Kiang; her cheeks were fairer than poppies, and when she bathed in the Hoang Ho her body seemed transparent. Her brow was finer than the most polished jade, while she seemed to walk, like a winged bird, without weight, her hair floating in a cloud. Indeed, she was the most beautiful creature that has ever existed.

Such loveliness could not escape the evil eye of Li Ting, and accordingly, as he grew in favour with Ti Hung, he obtained his consent to the drawing up of the marriage contracts. More than this, he had already sent to Ning two bracelets of the finest gold, tied together with a scarlet thread, as a betrothal present.

But as the proverb says, "The good bee will not touch the faded flower," and Ning, although compelled by the second of the Five Great Principles to respect her father, was unable to regard the marriage with anything but abhorrence. Perhaps this was not altogether the fault of Li Ting, for on the evening of the day on which she had received his present she walked in the rice fields, and sitting down at the foot of a funeral cypress, whose highest branches pierced the Middle Air, she cried aloud:

"I cannot control my bitterness. Of what use is it that I should be called the 'White Pigeon among Golden Lilies' if my beauty is but for the hog-like eyes of the exceedingly objectionable Li Ting? Ah, Yung Chang, my unfortunate lover! What evil spirit pursues you that you cannot pass your examination for the second degree? My noble-minded but ambitious boy, why were you not content with an agricultural or even a manufacturing career and happiness? By aspiring to a literary degree you have placed a barrier wider than the Whang Hai between us."

"As the earth seems small to the soaring swallow, so shall insuperable obstacles be overcome by the heart worn smooth with a fixed purpose," said a voice beside her, and Yung Chang stepped from behind the cypress-tree, where he had been waiting for Ning.

"O! one more symmetrical than the chrysanthemum," he continued, "I shall yet, with the aid of my ancestors, pass the second degree, and even obtain a position of high trust in the public office at Peking."

"And in the meantime," pouted Ning, "I shall have partaken of the wedding-cake of the utterly unpresentable Li Ting." And she exhibited the bracelets which she had that day received.

"Alas!" said Yung Chang, "there are times when one is tempted to doubt even the most efficacious and violent means. I had hoped that by this time Li Ting would have come to a sudden and most unseemly end, for I have drawn up and affixed in the most conspicuous places notifications of his character, similar to the one here."

Ning turned, and beheld fastened to the trunk of the cypress an exceedingly elegantly written and composed notice, which Yung read to her as follows:

BEWARE OF INCURRING DEATH FROM STARVATION

Let the distinguished inhabitants of this district observe the exceedingly ungraceful walk and bearing of the low person who calls himself Li Ting. Truthfully, it is that of a dog in the act of being dragged to the river because his sores and diseases render him objectionable in the house of his master. So will this hunchbacked person be dragged to the place of execution, and be bowstrung, to the great relief of all who respect the five senses: A Respectful Physiognomy, Passionless Reflection, Soft Speech, Acute Hearing, Piercing Sight.

He hopes to attain to the Red Button and the Peacock's Feather; but the right hand of the Deity itches, and Li Ting will assuredly be removed suddenly.

"Li Ting must certainly be in league with the evil forces,

if he can withstand so powerful a weapon," said Ning admiringly, when her lover had finished reading. "Even now he is starting on a journey, nor will he return till the first day of the month, when the sparrows go to the sea and are changed into oysters. Perhaps the fate will overtake him while he is away. If not——"

"If not," said Yung, taking up her words as she paused, "then I have yet another hope. A moment ago you were regretting my choice of a literary career.

"Learn, then, the value of knowledge. By its aid (assisted, indeed, by the spirits of my ancestors) I have discovered a new and strange thing, for which I can find no word. By using this new system of reckoning, your illustrious but exceedingly narrow-minded and miserly father would be able to make five taels where he now makes one. Would he not, in consideration for this, consent to receive me as a son-in-law, and dismiss the inelegant and unworthy Li Ting?"

"In the unlikely event of your being able to convince my illustrious parent of what you say, it would assuredly be so," replied Ning. "But in what way could you do so? My sublime and charitable father already employs all the means in his power to reap the full reward of his sacred industry. His 'solid household gods' are in reality mere shells of clay: higher-priced images are correspondingly constructed, and his clay-gatherers and modellers are all paid on a 'profit-sharing system.' Nay, further, it is beyond likelihood that he should wish for more purchasers, for so great is his fame that those who come to buy have sometimes to wait for days in consequence of those before them; for my exceedingly methodical sire entrusts none with the receiving of money, and the exchanges are therefore made slowly. Frequently an unnaturally devout person will require as many as a hundred idols, and so the greater part of the day will be passed."

"In what way?" inquired Yung tremulously.

"Why, in order that the countings may not get mixed, of course, it is necessary that when he has paid for one idol he should carry it to a place aside and then return and pay for the second, carrying it to the first, and in such a manner to the end. In this way the sun sinks behind the mountains."

"But," said Yung, his voice thick with his great discovery, "if he could pay for the entire quantity at once, then it would take but a hundredth part of the time, and so more idols could be sold."

"How could this be done?" inquired Ning wonderingly. "Surely it is impossible to conjecture the value of many idols."

"To the unlearned it would indeed be impossible," replied Yung proudly, "but by the aid of my literary researches I have been enabled to discover a process by which such results would be not a matter of conjecture, but of certainty."

"These figures I have committed to tablets, which I am prepared to give to your mercenary and slow-witted father in return for your incomparable hand, a share of the profits, and the dismissal of the uninventive and morally threadbare Li Ting."

"When the earthworm boasts of his elegant wings, the eagle can afford to be silent," said a harsh voice behind them; and turning hastily they beheld Li Ting, who had come upon them unawares. "Oh, most insignificant of tablet-spoilers," he continued, "it is very evident that much over-study has softened your usually well-educated brains. Were it not that you are obviously mentally afflicted, I should unhesitatingly persuade my beautiful and refined sword to introduce you to the spirits of your ignoble ancestors. As it is, I will merely cut off your nose and your left ear, so that people may not say that the Dragon of the Earth sleeps and wickedness goes unpunished."

Both had already drawn their swords, and very soon the blows were so hard and swift that, in the dusk of the evening, it seemed as though the air were filled with innumerable and many-coloured fireworks.

Each was a practised swordsman, and there was no advantage to be gained on either side, when Ning, who had fled on the appearance of Li Ting, reappeared, urging on her father, whose usually leisurely footsteps were quickened by the dread that the duel must result in certain loss to himself either of a valuable servant or of the discovery which Ning had briefly explained to him, and of which he at once saw the value.

"Oh, most distinguished and expert persons," he exclaimed

breathlessly, as soon as he was within hearing distance, "do not trouble to give so marvellous an exhibition for the benefit of this unworthy individual, who is the only observer of your illustrious dexterity! Indeed, your honourable condescension so fills this illiterate person with shame that his hearing is thereby preternaturally sharpened, and he can plainly distinguish many voices from beyond the Hoang Ho, crying for the Heaven-sent representative of the degraded Ti Hung to bring them more idols. Bend, therefore, your refined footsteps in the direction of Poo Chow, O Li Ting, and leave me to make myself objectionable to this exceptional young man with my intolerable commonplaces."

"The shadow falls in such a direction as the sun wills," said Li Ting, as he replaced his sword and departed.

"Yung Chang," said the merchant, "I am informed that you have made a discovery that would be of great value to me, as it undoubtedly would if it is all that you say. Let us discuss the matter without ceremony. Can you prove to me that your system possesses the merit you claim for it? If so, then the matter of arrangement will be easy."

"I am convinced of the absolute certainty and accuracy of the discovery," replied Yung Chang. "It is not as though it were an ordinary matter of human intelligence, for this was discovered to me as I was worshipping at the tomb of my ancestors. The method is regulated by a system of squares, triangles and cubes. But as the practical proof might be long, and as I hesitate to keep your adorable daughter out in the damp night air, may I not call at your inimitable dwelling in the morning, when we can go into the matter thoroughly?"

I will not weary you, who know all the books on mathematics off by heart, with a recital of the means by which Lung Chang proved to Ti Hung the accuracy of his tables and the value of his discovery of the multiplication table, which till then had been undreamt of. It is sufficient to know that he did so, and that Ti Hung agreed to his terms, only stipulating that Li Ting should not be made aware of his dismissal until he had returned and given in his accounts. The share of the profits that Yung was to receive was cut down very low by Ti Hung, but the young man did not mind that, as he would live with his father-in-law for the future.

With the introduction of this new system, the business increased like a river at flood-time. All rivals were left far behind, and Ti Hung put out this sign :

NO WAITING HERE !

Good morning ! Have you worshipped one of Ti Hung's refined ninety-nine cash idols ?

Let the purchasers of ill-constructed idols at other establishments, where they have grown old and venerable while waiting for the all-thumb proprietors to count up to ten, come to the shop of Ti Hung and regain their lost youth. Our ninety-nine cash idols are worth a tael a set. We do not, however, claim that they will do everything. The ninety-nine cash idols of Ti Hung will not, for example, purify linen, but even the most contented and frozen-brained person cannot be happy till he possesses one. What is happiness ? The exceedingly well-educated Philosopher defines it as the accomplishment of all our desires. Everyone desires one of Ti Hung's ninety-nine cash idols, therefore get one ; but be sure that it is Ti Hung's.

Have you a bad idol ? If so, dismiss it, and get one of Ti Hung's ninety-nine cash specimens.

Why does your idol look old sooner than your neighbour's ? Because yours is not one of Ti Hung's ninety-nine cash marvels.

They bring all delights to the old and the young.

The elegant idols supplied by Ti Hung.

[N.B.—The "Great Sacrifice" idol, forty-five cash, delivered, carriage free, in quantities of not less than twelve, at any temple, on the evening before the sacrifice.]

It was about this time that Li Ting returned. His journey had been more than usually successful, and he was well satisfied in consequence.

It was not until he had made out his accounts and handed in his money that Ti Hung informed him of his agreement with Yung Chang.

"Oh, most treacherous and excessively unpopular Ti Hung," exclaimed Li Ting, in a terrible voice, "this is the return you make for all my entrancing efforts in your service, then ? It is in this way that you reward my exceedingly unconscientious recommendations of your very inferior and unendurable clay idols, with their goggle eyes and concave stomachs ! Before I go, however, I request to be inspired to make the following remark—that I confidently predict your ruin. And now this low and undignified person will finally shake the elegant dust of your distinguished house from his thoroughly inadequate feet, and proceed to offer his incapable services to the rival establishment over the way."

"The machinations of such an evilly disposed person as Li Ting will certainly be exceedingly subtle," said Ti Hung to his son-in-law when the traveller had departed. "I must

counteract his omens. Herewith I wish to prophesy that henceforth I shall enjoy an unbroken run of good fortune. I have spoken, and assuredly I shall not eat my words."

As the time went on, it seemed as though Ti Hung had indeed spoken truly. The ease and celerity with which he transacted his business brought him customers and dealers from more regions than ever, for they could spend days on the journey and still save time. The army of clay-gatherers and modellers grew larger and larger, and the work-sheds stretched almost down to the river's edge. Only one thing troubled Ti Hung, and that was the uncongenial disposition of his son-in-law, for Yung took no further interest in the industry to which his discovery had given so great an impetus, but resolutely set to work again to pass his examination for the second degree.

"It is an exceedingly distinguished and honourable thing to have failed thirty-five times, and still to be undiscouraged," admitted Ti Hung; "but I cannot cleanse my throat from bitterness when I consider that my noble and lucrative business must pass into the hands of strangers, perhaps even into the possession of the unendurable Li Ting."

But it had been appointed that this degrading thing should not happen, however, and it was indeed fortunate that Yung did not abandon his literary pursuits; for after some time it became very apparent to Ti Hung that there was something radically wrong with his business. It was not that his custom was falling off in any way; indeed, it had lately increased in a manner that was phenomenal, and when the merchant came to look into the matter he found to his astonishment that the least order he had received in the past week had been for a hundred idols. All the sales had been large, and yet Ti Hung found himself most unaccountably deficient in taels. He was puzzled and alarmed, and for the next few days he looked into the business closely. Then it was that the reason was revealed, both for the falling off in the receipts and for the increase in the orders. The calculations of the unfortunate Yung Chang were correct up to a hundred, but at that number he had made a gigantic error—which, however, he was never able to detect and rectify—with the result that all transactions above that point worked out at a considerable loss to the seller. It was in vain that the panic-stricken and infuriated Ti Hung goaded his miserable

son-in-law to correct the mistake; it was equally in vain that he tried to stem the current of his enormous commercial popularity. He had competed for public favour, and he had won it, and every day his business increased till ruin grasped him by the pigtail. Then came an order from one firm at Peking for five millions of the ninety-nine cash idols, and at that Ti Hung put up his shutters and sat down in the dust.

"Behold!" he exclaimed, "in the course of a lifetime there are many very disagreeable evils that may overtake a person. He may offend the Sacred Dragon, and be in consequence reduced to a fine dry powder; or he may incur the displeasure of the benevolent and pure-minded Emperor, and be condemned to death by roasting; he may also be troubled by demons or by the disturbed spirits of his ancestors, or be struck by thunderbolts. Indeed, there are numerous annoyances, but they all become as Heaven-sent blessings in comparison to a self-opinionated and more than ordinarily weak-minded son-in-law. Of what avail is it that I have habitually sold one idol for the value of a hundred? The very objectionable man in possession sits in my delectable summer-house, and the unavoidable legal documents settle around me like a flock of pigeons. It is, indeed, necessary that I should declare myself to be in voluntary liquidation, and make an assignment of my book debts for the benefit of my creditors. Having accomplished this, I will proceed to the well-constructed tomb of my illustrious ancestors, and having kow-towed at their incomparable shrines, I will put an end to my distinguished troubles with this exceedingly well-polished sword."

"The wise man can adapt himself to circumstances as water takes the shape of the vase that contains it," said the well-known voice of Li Ting. "Let not the lion and the tiger fight at the bidding of the jackal. By combining our forces all may be well with you yet. Assist me to dispose of the entirely superfluous Yung Chang and to marry the elegant and symmetrical Ning, and in return I will allot to you a portion of my not inconsiderable income."

"However high the tree, the leaves fall to the ground, and your hour has come at last, O detestable Li Ting!" said Yung, who had heard the speakers and crept upon them unperceived. "As for my distinguished and immaculate

father-in-law, doubtless the heat has affected his indefatigable brains or he would not have listened to your contemptible suggestion. For yourself draw ! ”

Both swords flashed, but before a blow could be struck the spirits of his ancestors hurled Li Ting lifeless to the ground, to avenge the memories that their unworthy descendant had so often reviled.

“ So perish all the enemies of Yung Chang,” said the victor. “ And now, my venerated but exceedingly short-sighted father-in-law, learn how narrowly you have escaped making yourself exceedingly objectionable to yourself. I have just received intelligence from Peking that I have passed my second degree, and have in consequence been appointed to a remunerative position under the Government. This will enable us to live in comfort, if not in affluence, and the rest of your engaging days can be peacefully spent in flying kites.”

GEOFFREY MOSS

Primula

PRIMULA

THIS plant is the gem of my collection, *Primula Caspiensis Davidii*. I discovered it through a chance meeting with a Russian, a botanist who, having fled from Bolshevism, was earning his living as best he could in Jugoslavia. Here is the story :

I thought over what he had told me and decided to approach the Soviet Government for permission to undertake the expedition I had in mind. But before leaving London I found out all I could about the country he had described. The latest information about the district, I learned, had come from members of a British Military Mission which had been there just after the war. The general in charge had lost his life at the hands of the Bolshevik irregular forces, but one of his officers advised me to visit his widow, so I went.

Her flat was out of the lower end of Sloane Street. The drawing-room, despite a big bow window, contrived to be dark. Along the window seat were Japanese dwarf trees—abominations which annoy me. She was a tall, hard, rather graceful woman, nearing fifty.

I wanted to know about the country where her husband had lost his life. She would tell me all she knew. He had written home most enthusiastically about it, for he had been an ardent fisherman.

She showed me his portrait, the usual middle-aged soldier. The eyes were all I remember, strangely humorous.

There were, too, some clever sepia drawings of calm water, a stretch of low shore, and some rough huts. Her husband had done them. . . . Did I see that cape? It had been on the other side of it that he had been lost, when out fishing.

"Curious," she said. "I always had a presentiment against his fishing."

Surreptitiously I turned over the pages of the sketch book.

Meanwhile my hostess talked on, very pleasantly, in a voice pitched just a little too high.

Yes, he had wanted to spend their honeymoon on some stream in Bohemia, while she had wanted to take him to "beloved" Florence. The watercolours on the walls were "mementoes of happy days." She was no doubt a pleasant enough woman, but those Siamese cats wandered about and made that disgusting noise of their species—but I don't like cats.

The general had been a good Russian scholar, and on that account had been given charge of that military mission, thrust out into the wilds of Central Asia.

For months nothing happened. The mission employed agents to supply information as to what was happening still further in the heart of the Continent. Meanwhile the members of it shot, fished and amused themselves as best they could. For the general the place must have been a paradise.

Fishing! Naturally, she had never actually tried to stop it, but, when it had clashed with some social event, she had done her best to persuade him which to choose. In soldiering the social side was so important—especially in India!

Well, after some months things began to take an unpleasant turn. Disquieting rumours came from the North. Food supplies became scarcer. Once or twice the Mission's sketchy communications with its base were interrupted. Once an officer out duck-shooting heard a bullet whistle past him. For a week or so all was quiet, then a boat belonging to the Mission was burnt one night, and one morning a sentry was found dead with a knife between his shoulders.

The officers began to grow uncomfortable. They were there to observe: they had no earthly chance of putting up a fight, and the countryside, which had welcomed their arrival, was obviously turning against them.

Sometimes at night they would be conscious of people prowling around their camp. Then for days the silence of those wild lands would descend about them.

Then one evening at dusk they saw a fire somewhere northwards along the coast. The general called a conference. His instructions had been beautifully vague, freeing the higher authority from responsibility—"to observe and report upon enemy activity, political or military, in or about, etc., etc. ;

to remain, etc., etc., but not to endanger unduly the safety of the Mission." After a long discussion it was arranged that all should be kept in readiness for departure at an hour's notice; but that, as food was so scarce, fishing and shooting should be continued by officers—to their general relief, no doubt!

Then one day, when the general had gone up the coast, an agent from whom nothing had been heard for weeks dashed into the camp with the news that large Bolshevik forces were approaching. Preparations for retreat were made and the recall signal was given. But there was no sign of the head of the Mission. The afternoon wore on. It was time to go. They dared not risk being attacked at night. One officer undertook to stay behind till dusk, and the forlorn little band marched away.

Next morning the young fellow rejoined. He had waited till after dark, had sent up rockets, but had seen no answering ones from the general. Eventually the party reached its base. Of course, they heard rumours of how the general had come by his end, yet nothing certain was ever discovered.

Well, I took a last look at the watercolours and those cats, and I departed. And I sent flowers—from a florist; showy stuff, of no conceivable interest.

Getting to the Caspian was no joke. Difficulties of every sort—dirt, delay, vile food. At length I arrived. I found a boat and a boatman. We started off.

The coast was flat; peaty wastes, forests, a desolate shoreline with an occasional wretched hut.

It was late one afternoon that I found my primula, that strangest of the whole family. The weather was threatening . . . intermittent rumbling of thunder. My boatman was all for getting away, but nothing could get me away. I had found this unique species, a regular meadow of these little chaps; orange against the sombre background of the forest and the grey of the sky. Extraordinary!

It's odd, but that afternoon the greyness seemed to get on my nerves. There were no birds singing. The forest grew darker and darker. My boatman, too, kept crossing himself and muttering. Eventually, an hour before dark, we launched the boat.

We hadn't gone more than a mile when the thing started—a solid wall of rain; and after it came the wind.

In a matter of minutes there was an ugly sea running. I headed in towards the shore and kept just outside the rushes. To add to our pleasure, night was descending. I held our course on the chance, and presently saw the perches of a stake-net, upright in that slantwise, windswept world. On the shore was a hut. I rounded in and beached our boat.

We scrambled to the door and hammered on it. A gaunt fisherman appeared, and eventually we persuaded him to let us in. The hut was like others: a trodden earth floor, home-made furniture and a fire; at the back a door leading to another room.

Our host was vigorous, his Russian—as far as I could judge—was pure, and it struck me that he might have once been of *bourgeoisie*. I tried to be pleasant to him, but he kept aloof. Outside the wind howled—the very dickens of a night!

Once I spoke of the Military Mission, for their camp must have been within a few miles of where we were sitting. On this subject our host was even less communicative. All that had been before his time, he told me. After all, I was a foreigner. Most likely he and his neighbours had helped themselves to the abandoned British stores. And that had been long ago! I turned in and slept well.

When I awoke the sun was high, the sea smooth, and my boatman was busy preparing breakfast. As for the owner of the hut, he was in the other room, for I could hear him humming some tune which seemed somehow familiar.

Presently he came in, but now that it was day he was even less communicative. He helped us to launch our boat and I persuaded him to accept some provisions in return for the night's lodging. But even before we had pushed off, he had turned back to his hut. I don't remember seeing anyone so obviously relieved to get rid of his guests.

Thus it was all the more annoying when I found I had left my camera behind and had to go back for it. I landed and walked up to the hut. Through the open door I could hear the fisherman whistling in the further room. Suddenly I knew that the tune was—"Tipperary." I stood stock still. He must have learnt that tune from the Military Mission.

I crossed the floor and looked into the inner room. There he sat, on his bed. I got a look round before he knew that

I was there. On the rough walls was evidence enough that I was right; some obviously English fishing-rods and, what was more curious still, several sketches like those I had seen in that flat in London. Then the man realised I was there and jumped up. I don't know which of us was the more surprised, for, just as he did so, two objects hanging in the corner caught my eye—a much-worn khaki greatcoat and the gold-braided cap of a British General.

He knew what I had seen and he stood there challengingly, his legs apart and his thumbs slipped through the rope which served him as a belt. Slowly his weather-beaten lips twisted into a smile and there came into his grey eyes an ironic expression which seemed to make them familiar to me.

There I stood, gaping like a duffer, while gradually in my brain a jig-saw puzzle of ideas fitted into each other. I remembered that dark drawing-room; those Japanese dwarf trees; those raucous Siamese cats; that steely woman who had tried to make her husband realise that the social side of soldiering was more important than his fishing. And, as I remembered these things, I realised all at once who the man before me was: and also the reason why he had chosen to lose himself rather than return home.

There was nothing to say. For a moment we stood so. Then without a word I went down to the boat.

Again I pushed off. The boat gathered way. Then I looked towards the shore. There at the water's edge, his hand lifted in a gay and courtly farewell stood that lean, still athletic figure, once more alone, lost now for ever in the exile he had chosen.

NORMAN MATSON

The House on Big Faraway

THE HOUSE ON BIG FARAWAY

"SURELY the old woman told you she was *going* toward the Partelo farm, or had passed by there, something of that sort, rather than that she was staying there," Dr. Greerson said, gently correcting his host.

Bunny Brooks was positive. "'*Staying*' was the word she used."

Dr. Greerson hesitated, seemed to decide not to argue. He was a stout man with a brown beard. He turned toward Bunny's sister. "What did you think of her, Natalie?"

Only her grey eyes moved, meeting his. "I did not see her."

Young Kenneth Durham, the Doctor's nephew, laughed in his nose. He was sprawled out for six feet on the grass. The Doctor owned a farm fifteen miles away. They were, the four of them, on the newly-cut lawn of Bunny's discovery, an old farm house with a stone chimney, small window panes and clapboards black with weather. It had been unoccupied for years, standing blind and empty on its round hill. Now that all its windows looked again they saw a scene that had greatly changed. The horizon was green woods.

The only meadow left—it sloped down to the glinting pond—was covered with sumac and young birch trees, its high stone walls lost under a tangle of grape vines, elderberry and poison ivy. And there was not in all the landscape one house visible, though thirty years before all this abandoned land was farmed.

Bunny was a small, rather dapper, city man with grey hair parted neatly in the middle, a neat round face. On either side of his nose was a red mark from the grip of the glasses that usually rode there, slanted forward, gleaming. He swung the glasses now at the end of their ribbon, nervously, his forehead puckered as with some irritating thought.

"Doctor, where is this Partelo farm?"

"Half a mile that way—it's on the Big Faraway Road, too."

"Who are they—the Partelos?"

"There aren't any Partelos."

"Who lives there?"

"Nobody lives there."

Young Kenneth rolled half over and looked at the reddening afternoon sky, laughed with his big mouth. He had known that was coming.

"The house is empty?"

"There isn't any house. There's nothing there but a heap of chimney stones."

"And lilacs," Kenneth said. "Haw, haw."

Bunny tucked his glasses away. He looked quite dashed.

Natalie said: "If you're making it up, Bunny, do leave off now." She was pretty in a frail way, nostrils waxy and her ears small. Her hair was pale gold.

"No, I didn't see her, Doctor," she said. "I was in the back of the house. When I heard Bunny's voice I was frightened."

"At your brother's voice?" Dr. Greerson looked at her curiously.

"We've been alone here for three days. No one comes by on the road, you know, it goes nowhere but here: beyond it is quite impassable. I called out: 'Bunny, are you talking to yourself?' Then I went out into the front hall and . . ."

"I'll tell it," her brother said. "I had gone upstairs to get a coil of wire I remembered having seen in the bedroom (there's only one finished room up there; the rest is attic, you know). The door wouldn't open at first. The latch must have fallen. I had to shove hard to get in. I picked up the wire—it was rusty and quite useless I found out later—and started down again. Someone had closed the door at the bottom of the stairway."

"I am sure I didn't," Natalie put in quietly. She had evidently said this before as it angered her brother. He spoke loudly, turning on her: "Very well. It was the cook we haven't got. It was a ghost. What the devil difference does it make what it was?"

"Oh, come," Dr. Greerson said reasonably, "It was the wind."

Kenneth winked at Natalie.

"Anyway," Bunny went on, "it was damned dark on that stairway. I had to grope for the catch and I came out blinking against the bright square of light from the window in the front door. When I could see clearly I was looking at *her*."

"Who?" Kenneth asked.

"An old woman in a bonnet. Her face was close to the pane, her mouth slightly open. One tooth here at the side was gone. She was screwing up her eyes to see in, shading them with one hand. The hand had a black, fingerless mitten on it. She was looking at the air in front of me. Her eyes lifted slowly, focussed into mine. They opened wide. We stared at each other through the glass. I was frightened, I'll admit, but I managed to open the door and I said: 'How d'you do?'

"She said slowly in a whisper, 'I don't know who you are.' I didn't say anything. For a moment I wasn't sure myself who I was. She whispered: 'I'm staying at the Partelo's.' Then, 'If you see my sister say I went to church.'

"Who was her sister? Someone who had lived in this house before us? I didn't know. I realised I was rudely gaping at her, our first visitor. I said 'Come in, won't you?' but she shook her black bonnet. 'I'll be back,' she whispered, and that was all. She went away. I watched her go along the road. She had scarlet stocking on and shiny black shoes."

Natalie looked to Dr. Greerson, wanting to know what he thought. She said: "So I called out: 'Are you talking to yourself, Bunny?' He didn't answer. I found him staring at the empty road. I ran out the back way, ran round the other side of the corn crib, my eyes all ready to see his old woman; but the air was empty. She had evaporated."

"There's a footpath into the woods there," Dr. Greerson said. He repeated this as if he thought it important.

"You ran after her!" Bunny exclaimed. "That was a damned funny thing to do."

Kenneth sat up. His eyes were bright with mischief. He picked a blade of grass, said thoughtfully: "Scarlet stockings!"

Bunny turned as if he had been slapped. "Yes. I saw them. I saw her and I talked with her."

"Man, man, we believe you," Dr. Greerson said.

"But you don't. Kenneth doesn't. Natalie doesn't. Hell, I've got feelings! Doctor, you tell me, you're supposed

to know something about the mind, you tell me why I should imagine that old woman."

"You didn't imagine her. You saw her, actually in the flesh. We all know that. But you were going to show me the old mill dam, where you plan the swimming pool. Come on, the afternoon's already gone."

"Sorry." Bunny got up, looked at Kenneth.

Kenneth shook his head. "I've seen your dam."

Bunny and the Doctor started down through the timothy grass toward the pond.

They were soon out of sight. A Bob White called, sudden as a pistol, shot and that seemed to mark the end of the day, though it was still broad light. A chill breath ran across the yard.

"Who was she?" Natalie reached for Kenneth and his hand met hers, held it. They were to be married, or at least so they had planned for two years. Her expression made him laugh.

"Who was she? Nobody, darling." He tapped his forehead. "Is Bunny often followed by funny old women? Are you?"

"No. Or," she smiled, parting her red lips slowly, "or generally I'm not. I do feel strange upstairs. In the bedroom—my room now—whoever was there before me and who is gone now, is still there, in a way. For years this house waited. Now we come. Still the house waits. I don't know what for. I wish I did." He noticed goose-flesh on her arm. An actual shudder had run through her even while she smiled.

Saying how soon she would get over such notions, he put an arm around her waist, and she relaxed, pleased. All the green wood was still. It was evening.

"People walk about upstairs in these old houses, creak-creak, back and forth." He smiled down on her, feeling superior. "Know why? Because the wide floor-boards expand and contract with temperature changes. That's all. Bertha Bliven's no more than a thermal crack. Haw. Haw."

"Who's Bertha Bliven?"

"She opens doors. She's in the bedroom upstairs."

"My room!"

"Yes, and if I tell you about her you'll begin to imagine that you see her with her legs all limp, so I won't tell you."

"Please."

He was eager to tell, really; and he quickly made her see Bertha Bliven, a thin woman of thirty-something, of extraordinary vitality and a bitterness toward Farmer Bliven. Neither one of their two babies had lived long, and she grieved for them. Perhaps he was weary of her grief. Once he thrashed her with a bridle. Bertha's sister Matilda, who was thirteen or fourteen, would walk down the road and visit. She came one Sunday on her way to church. Bertha wouldn't go. "I'll stay here alone," she said.

Matilda had gone on for a mile. There she stopped. For thinking of her sister's strange expression she could not go on nor turn back. In the end she turned back, retraced her steps, passed the smithy, over the little bridge, the long bridge where the Bonacutt rushes over big stones, under the chestnuts by the white school-house. When she came to the lower barn she stopped. Here one had the first glimpse of her sister's house. It had changed. Shutters upstairs and down were tight closed, all of them.

She crept in the back door, called "Bertha!" in the darkness. No one answered. She dared at last to call at the stair door. She went up, one step at a time, and knocked.

In the attic darkness she remembered the still clear noon-day that surrounded the house. She heard her heart.

From inside the bedroom began another pounding, rapid and irregular, growing louder. It thundered through the house. Matilda ran down and hid in the cupboard under the stairs.

When Bliven returned from church Matilda was lying on the floor, hands to her ears. To prove to her that there was nothing to be afraid of, that Bertha had merely gone back to their mother's, as she had often threatened, he forced Matilda to go back upstairs with him.

Of course, Bertha was there in the bedroom. The wire she had used had cut into her neck; blood lay long and thick down her Sunday white, and her stockinged heels had struck great holes in the plaster. In the candle-light her face seemed quite black.

"I suppose, it was," Kenneth added. "One has to fill it here and there."

Natalie played with her thin white hands, looking at them. She nodded slowly.

"Good story?"

"Yes, a good, dreadful story. What a dreadful thing to do to that girl. What happened to her?"

"There history is silent."

As soon as the others returned Kenneth and Dr. Greerson prepared to leave. The Doctor asked Natalie, holding her hands, "What has he been telling you?"

"Stories." She stood very straight like a little girl. "Good night, Doctor. Good night, Kenneth."

"And you, Bunny, get a lot of sunlight into that house of yours. And fires going! I'm afraid it's still damp."

Night had fallen. They inched along in second gear to the old Providence turnpike, a mile away, fearful lest tie-rod or differential strike against a stone. On asphalt at last and rolling smoothly, Kenneth said: "He ought to be psycho-analysed."

Dr. Greerson said: "Bosh."

"Well, he sees things, doesn't he? He almost had Natalie believing in that old woman. I told her there never was such a person, that she was a figment of Bunny's disordered imagination."

"You did!"

"I certainly did!"

The Doctor found he had to think about that. He slowed down. He stopped and pulled the brake back.

"What's the matter?"

"What else did you tell her?"

The young man's voice rose. "What else! My dear Uncle, she is my——" He broke off, with a gasp. The headlights made a clear-edged cavern in the black dark. Someone had stepped into that radiance. An old woman. A stooping old woman with a bonnet on, who grinned and showed where one tooth was gone.

In a harsh whisper, peering blindly, she asked: "Who's that behind those glary lights?"

"Dr. Greerson."

"Good evening to you, Doctor." She had gone back into the darkness, was walking away.

The Doctor started the car. After a minute: "That's Matilda," he said, "Matilda Morris, sister to Bertha Bliven who hanged herself. Matilda's the little girl or was. She's quite all right in the mind save for that one memory. Hello,

there's a drop of rain." He started the windshield wiper. "She often walks this road. Walks like a man. She's strong."

"I'd have offered her a lift but she always refuses. They say she used to go running to that house, trying to be on time, you know, over and over again. The house was boarded up, of course, and the first sight of it often would straighten her out. She'd snap back to normal, but not always; she has been seen trying to open the front door, whimpering, calling out to her sister that she was coming."

Kenneth's dry mouth finally made words. "So you knew it was she all the time Bunny was telling us?"

"Of course."

"And you said nothing. Explained nothing to him."

"He's high-strung, though not as high-strung as his sister. I didn't want to feed their imaginations any more than they had already been fed."

Here was the Greerson driveway. They left the car in an open carriage-shed and ran through pelting rain for a side door.

A gusty wind staggered against the window-panes. Greerson sat down before his fire. Kenneth paced the long room. He said:

"Which direction was she going?"

"Up the road, home—I suppose."

"Sure?"

Dr. Greerson slowly shook his head. "Come to think of it, maybe she wasn't."

"Maybe she was going back."

"Back where?"

"To her sister's. To Bunny's house. For the first time she finds somebody to open the door for her. You know, I think we'd better go back there, too."

"In this downpour? Over that road?"

"We'll say that we've actually seen the old woman, that we know who she is, that she's . . . Do come, for God's sake."

"They'll be in bed, my boy."

"Yes. But you see, I did another wrong thing. I told Natalie about Bertha Bliven and how her little sister came calling her, too late."

"You're a donkey," Dr. Greerson said.

Kenneth did not deny that. "All right. But I must get there, and quickly."

"Go ahead."

"But you must come, we might need you."

II

With lamps and candles darkness is always near; rooms are not filled tanks of light as with electricity. Natalie, putting dishes away in the new lean-to kitchen, walked from darkness to darkness. A whip-poor-will began loudly its witless reiteration outside the window and bending down she looked out, saw in silhouette a large bird on the stone wall, ugly in a nameless fashion, saw how it raised its head and fluttered its wing each time it whistled, heard the slight smacking sound after. She wished it would go away.

In the big room that had been the kitchen, within the outer radiance of the fire in the huge fireplace, Bunny sat at a trestle table, as usual writing down and diagramming further plans for the farm. He did not speak as she came in from the kitchen and sat down opposite him, started to sew on pink silk. The light was on her chin and under her eyes, which were all shadow save when she looked this way and that. Then they flashed . . . It was too quiet. She wanted Bunny to say something. She did not believe in his old woman. Was he, she wondered, really a little queer despite his precise words, his neat diagrams?

Into the silence, spreading out, filling it like a quick torrent, like the rising spreading sound heard under ether, she heard one word, one straining whisper:

"Bertha!"

Natalie looked at her sewing. Bunny made another mark on his paper.

There were many other sounds, sounds in the walls. She even heard the latch of the front door click, and click again, as if it had been closed after someone entering. Her imagination was running wild. She looked across without raising her eyes, stealthily, at Bunny's hand, the one holding the pencil. Was it trembling? Was he too concealing his fears? She would have to say something.

"It's getting late." Her voice seemed loud.

He looked up, smiled. "Must be all of nine o'clock. How sleepy we get out here!"

"Let's go to bed."

He yawned and agreed; went out into the front hall and locked the door. He called from there: "Why did you lock the cupboard under the stairs?"

"I didn't lock it."

He came back. "Perhaps I did," he said. "It's no matter."

They went upstairs, he first, said good-night at the head of the stairway.

"Sleep well."

"I'll try," she said. His expression in the lamplight was strange; his eyes moved too quickly. Was he terrified, as she was; or was this again her imagination?

From his bed in a far corner of the great attic he called cheerfully to her. For a long time she combed her hair in the lamplight, watching herself in the mirror. Behind her on that square beam was an iron hook. Was that the one Bertha had used? Possibly. She combed very slowly. If she could only lock the door, perhaps that would make her feel better. But there was no lock, the latch was broken.

She heard, or seemed to hear, a door open downstairs in the hall. The cupboard door. One hand up with the comb she waited. It was nothing. It was the wind. . . . A stair creaked, quite plainly. After a long time another creaked. She heard someone breathing out there, just outside her door.

The latch began to move.

The door opened. She, the old woman, stood in the doorway, black bonnet and shawl gleaming with rain. She was terrified, her white hands shaking as she raised them and came into the room.

Natalie moved back. The lamp went over with an outburst of brittle little sounds. For a moment it was dark, black dark. In that blindness she felt the old woman's arms tight around her.

III

Midway between highway and farm the car hit something with a clang. For a moment they sat in silence. The rain had stopped. Kenneth climbed out, flashlight in hand,

Presently he said: "Tie-rod's bent almost double. We'll have to leave her here."

They splashed and stumbled on. At the first stone gate there was the house, and a light upstairs, reflecting on the wet leaves of an elm. They went on through the orchard. Kenneth whispered: "Wait!" and pointed.

Under an apple tree near the house stood Matilda. She did not move.

"Good thing we came," Kenneth whispered.

The light upstairs was brighter. Lights flickered in the downstairs windows.

Bunny's voice, high strangled, called: "Who's that?"

"Dr. Greerson and I," Kenneth shouted. "We came back. The car——"

"For God's sake come quickly. Natalie's gone."

They found him crawling in the long grass. He looked up at them. "Natalie's gone."

He tried to tell how he had heard her screams, had found her room ablaze, had tried in vain to smother the fire.

All the windows were broadly lighted now. From the rain-soaked shingles of the great roof rose clouds of steam and smoke, and within a multitude of voices were started, crackling, whistling, whispering. The green woods stared. As flames filled the kitchen wing a dish fell. A small, deliberate crash, then another and another.

They looked over the ground for Natalie, called her name. The Doctor found her lying at Matilda's feet.

"What have you done?"

The old woman looked above his head at the glare of the fire. She was smiling. The roof-tree pitched down with a rending final cry.

"I carried her out—in time, in time," Matilda said. Her head was filled with a weary confusion of madness and actual memories. How many times through the years she had come back here! She sighed: "At last. At last."

Dr. Greerson on his knees listened for life. Terror, he thought. How would he tell those others. He pretended to listen.

MAX PEMBERTON

If a Man Might Tarry

IF A MAN MIGHT TARRY

I NEVER walk down Holborn and come to the old houses that stand over against Gray's Inn but I think of handsome Ben Calderon and of little Kitty Mervin that was to have married him just about one hundred and forty years ago.

What a priceless survival is this of the old gabled crookedness, tenements all awry, and little squares of glass, speaking of the London of Pepys and Bludworth. So they stood when Charles rode in—so they were the ornament of the city “without the Bars” when Raleigh went to execution, and taking the cup of sack they offered him, remembered another who had gone to the gallows before him and drank also as he went.

“As the fellow,” said he, “that, drinking of St. Giles’ bowl as he went to Tyburn, said ‘that were good drink if a man might tarry by it.’”

To be sure, everybody set down these words to Ben Calderon, and if everybody says that he uttered them—well, everybody must be right, though some of us who have read the old records think differently.

Oddly enough, I thought of Ben not a week ago when upon my way to visit a prosaic solicitor who dwells in that garden of legal bliss which is but a stone’s throw from Southampton Row.

There were the old houses, all huddled up together and leaning one upon another, as though to say “how tired we are after all these centuries.” And there, looking from one of the tiny casements, was Kitty Mervin herself—at least, she seemed to my willing imagination to be the very re-incarnation of that Kitty who, as I say, was so notorious for her beauty just one hundred and forty years ago.

Really, for the moment, I was tempted to lift my hat to her and to express my sympathy with the beautiful child who had suffered so many misfortunes.

"Kitty," I would have said, "you fell in love with a dashing lad for your sins, and when you begged his life of that old madman, George III, you received a scurvy answer enough. Of course, it was a disgraceful thing for your Ben to have taken to the road after he lost all his money at the gaming houses in St. James's Street. Nevertheless, my pretty child, he was a gentlemanly fellow enough, robbed neither the widow nor the orphan, took money chiefly from the fat profiteers of his day and spent it with a lavish hand. His arrest, my dear, as you know, was the unhappy result of a most unfortunate mistake. Perceiving two figures in black cloaks upon Finchley Common, he mistook them for those of the Bishop of Ely and his chaplain, whereas, by dire misfortune they were those of two of the Bow Street horse-patrol, but recently put upon the Great North Road. What happened afterwards is too sad for me to speak of intimately. The tears you shed at the trial; the good things you sent into Newgate for Ben, the poor boy; the way you fainted when the dread sentence of the law was carried out—why speak of all this in the year 1931? Besides, most beautiful creature, are you not merely the ghost of the Kitty of yesterday—and if I were to ascend the crooked stairs which led to your sacred chamber, might I not discover that you, like your angelic predecessor in that very apartment, are an actress at the King's Theatre in Drury Lane, if it be but a rôle most humble? Even, Kitty, I might find you at a typewriter, and that would be the end of all things. No, no, my dear, as between you and me, we will leave the story where it is, but for these others, our readers—well, they might wish to know something more, for indeed, it is a pretty narrative."

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I say that this beautiful creature stood at the window just as the real Kitty stood so many years ago. If her thoughts concerned the theatre, then would the coincidence be most wonderful—for you must know that the real Kitty sang in the opera of George's day, though in a humble capacity, I fear, if not without notoriety.

Twice a noble lord, Ben Calderon's uncle, attempted to have her kidnapped and failed humiliatingly. An earl, they say, offered to make her his mistress and might have made her his wife if his cousin, the Bishop of Ely, had not painted

such a picture of the hell which awaits earls who marry chorus ladies that the old gentleman left drinking off and took instead to his lordship's sermons. Then there is her portrait painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds himself, and Charles James Fox's praise of her beauty, and Boswell's gossip, and a hundred other witnesses to her charm and her prettiness. No wonder the town wept with her when the crisis came.

So this was the young fellow in whose arms she had lain while earls and lords were courting her—this gambler, this gallows bird, this pretty villain of the piece—this her true lover; this her secret. London heard of it with wonder, and the noble earls with fine oaths. All was consternation at Old Drury when she played. How the groundlings cheered her the night after the arrest! Ballads were made and sung. Ministers delivered homilies from proud pulpits—the gamblers of St. James's were ready to wager that Ben Calderon would swing at Tyburn within the week, and nobody would take their money. A tragic business, truly a terrible example of the folly of youth, and the penalty which folly must pay.

They sentenced poor Ben to be hanged, and a pompous judge uttered pious platitudes while he spoke of the halter.

"Prisoner at the bar," said he, "you came into the world surrounded by those of noble birth who are the just pride of our country—you leave it in the company of villains, of whom the world is well quit. Unusually favoured by fortune, of a countenance whereon there seem to be stamped traits of nobility, piety and the insignia of holy religion—this face is but a mask for infamy and evil dealing. I see in you the perversion of all those finer instincts which lead men to the respect of their fellow men and of the community. You would have stooped even to the robbery of a venerable father in God, had not a beneficent providence set his foot upon another road and sent as the avengers of society the officers whom vainly you called upon to deliver their valuables. Valuable truly were the gyves they set upon your wrists—wholesome verily the fetters with which they hampered your evil steps. In these you shall go to that place whence you came, and there be hanged by the neck until you be dead—and the Lord have mercy upon your soul."

His lordship's chaplain unfortunately sneezed at this moment and spoiled what otherwise would have been a

most impressive address, but Ben was booked for the ride to Tyburn all right, and there were but three days to pass before he must set out in the fatal cart.

What days they were—of hours swiftly speeding; of bells tolling the passing of the precious moments; of nights, all too brief, of revelry, and carousal—for no parson that ever was born could have brought Ben to a proper sense of his position, and many an old friend was allowed to enter Newgate with wine for his passport and strong waters to pay a reckoning.

With these they cheered the doomed man, saying—"It's all right, Ben, the King won't let you go hang," or, "Don't you know Kitty war with the Earl this morning, and he is going to see what he can do," or again, "They say the Bishop would give you another chance, Ben, for he fears there will be too few aristocrats in heaven when he gets there, and he doesn't like old faces. Keep up your courage, man. Nobody dare refuse the Bishop—they're frightened of his tongue, lad, and he can damn their souls with the best of them."

Ben, it may be, put little faith in these optimists, but he was glad to see Kitty and he hugged her about ten thousand times; wiped away her tears with a beautiful lace-edged handkerchief and begged her to believe that he had always intended to marry her, though often a little careless in such affairs.

"We'll be going over the water together, Kitty, my girl," said he, "and you shall be the belle of them all in old Virginia or wherever it be they send me now that the American rebels have turned their backs on good King George. Said I not that you were always intended for a farmer's lass, and a farmer will I be. Ay, my precious, shed no more tears and go home and pack your pretties. They'll not hang Ben Calderon. There are too many of his kith and kin in high places ever to permit that. Gad, my beauty, but half of them ought to swing with me anyway, and the other half should follow after when right is done. So drink to our freedom, Kitty dearest, and hey ho for the good ship that is to carry us across the water!"

Kitty dried her tears and finished every drop of the large glass of wine that he offered her. Not lacking in courage, she lost not a moment afterwards in visiting the old Earl who had desired to marry her, and the Bishop, his cousin,

who had so stoutly opposed the union. Upon the knees of both these worthies it is to be feared that she sat, and while the Earl kissed her amorously, the Bishop's osculation was merely episcopal. Yet both were unanimous upon one point—and it was this, that while they thought Ben was a reprobate who should be punished severely, nevertheless no exertion of theirs should be spared to release him and that to such an end they would go to the King at once, petitions in their hands and humility in their mouths.

"You can rely upon me, my pretty bird," said the Earl—and here he kissed her.

"Daughter," said the Bishop, "I wot not if anything is to be done: yet in so far as my poor voice may be heard"—and here also he imprinted upon her chaste lips an episcopal salute of the greatest propriety.

Kitty was a consummate actress off the stage, whatever she might have been on, and to each of these splendid personages she dropped a curtsy and offered a word of her humble thanks.

"Ah, my lord"—this to the Earl—"if I could thank your lordship!"

"But you can," says the Earl, "you know that you can——"

"Wait until my Ben is released," she ran on, "then you shall see——"

"Shall I?" cries my lord, his old eyes watering with delight—"you'll come and tell me all about it."

"Indeed and I will," rejoins Kitty, "and bring my Ben with me."

What the Earl said at this point goes better unrecorded, perhaps, but the saintly bishop merely answered, "God bless you, my daughter, come and see me as often as you like,"—and that naturally he meant purely in his priestly capacity—as he did a little present of ten golden guineas to help the poor young man in that dreadful situation to which it had pleased the Almighty to reduce him.

The guineas were much to Kitty's liking, and she hurried back to the old house in Holborn and sat down earnestly to think about all this awful business and what really was best to be done in it. A shrewd little woman, perhaps she put more faith in her own good wits than in the kisses of the nobility or the hope of kings. Even now at the eleventh

hour she found it impossible to believe that her Ben lay under sentence of death, and when she did realise it her tears by no means damped her energies or extinguished that ardour of self-confidence which alone could save her lover.

"He shall not go to Tyburn," she cried passionately—and then, "Dear God, I don't know how to pray, but oh! save him and send my Ben back to me——"

This, mark you, was twenty-four hours before the time appointed for the last dread ordeal—but twenty-four hours to run until Ben should mount the terrible cart, a flower in his buttonhole and the death draught all ready for him at the George Inn, where the procession had halted since it became a procession at all. The day was short enough, but Kitty lost no minute of it. To St. James's Palace she went, to the houses of the judges, even to that miserable habitation in Brooke Street where lived the old mother of Will Roker, who was Ben's jailer at Newgate. A full hour she spent with this poor old woman and affecting enough the interview appeared to be—for there were tears in the eyes of both women when they parted, and the elder kissed the younger as though she had been truly her mother.

"Will would have a devil's heart to resist me," said the poor old creature as Kitty left her at the door of the cottage, though what was to be asked of Will, or why he should resist, no record is written. Suffice it to say that Kitty returned to the old house by "Holbourn Bars," and having tarried there a little while, went thence to Newgate and was no more heard of at her own home until the appointed hour of execution, when they saw her at her window—even as I fancied to see her stand yesterday—and the great bouquet of roses went hurtling down into the very cart which carried poor Ben Calderon to Tyburn.

So they had failed then, the most reverend the Bishop, his lordship the Earl, and those about the Royal presence who had been so ready to offer mediation. Even at the eleventh hour Ben's friends had hoped; but their hope was vain. "An example must be made," said Farmer George. The sons of the aristocracy must be taught a lesson—in brief, Ben must die. And so the bell of St. Sepulchre's was tolled as usual, Holborn was lined by eager people, the George Inn crammed with Ben's friends, and the cup prepared as it had been beyond the memory of the oldest. And

when Ben lifted it he used the words we have written.

"A pleasant drink if a man might tarry by it!"

Poor boy!—there was to be but a brief tarrying for him. And yet men said that he looked the merest lad, frail and mincing in his figure, though he wore an odd cape which had come out of Old Drury's and a jester's cap, close-fitting upon his ears—as, he said, for Kitty's sake.

"We have played Harlequin and Columbine together," he told them, "and is not death the great jest of them all? Let me get to heaven with a laugh—or never will I get there at all," and they humoured him, Will Roker above them all, since the power was his and the keys of the prison were in his hands.

"Thou must leap to-day as thou never didst before, my lad," said the jailer merrily, "if thou wouldst come through old Ned's halter safely. Still, I'll not gainsay you. Let the people laugh—'tis better than thou shouldst go with tears, though, I doubt not, thy Kitty will weep sorely enough this day and many a day to come."

Ben retorted that he believed nothing of the kind—for Kitty was not of the weeping sort—and sure enough she showed a smiling face enough when the death-cart rumbled by her home and she flung her bunch of roses straight at her lover's heart.

"Bravo, Kitty girl!" cried the multitude of people—and a bravo was heard even from the sour old lawyers who stood at the gate of Gray's Inn or lounged about the purlieus of Fetter Lane. These had looked for the "vapours" or some other womanly evidence of despair, but Kitty was brave above the best of them, and to Harlequin was she loyal even in that grave hour. Not until the procession had passed from her sight did she quit the window—and then it was as one sore pressed for time, who had a great work to do and but little leisure in which to do it. Holborn, indeed, saw her no more for many a long day-- there was no pretty figure at that ancient window to which the gallants used to lift their caps. And oddly enough, none lamented her absence—which is the strangest thing in all this curious story.

But we are forgetting poor Ben, whose bones were now rattled over the stones as they hurried him to Tyburn, and for whom the sun would soon cease to shine and the radiance of a summer's day exist no more. By St. Giles he went and

so into the Oxford Road at the beginning of the lane to Tottenham—for there was no New Oxford Street in those days—and coming out at length into the open country about the spot where New Bond Street now begins he discovered Tyburn in the distance and the three-legged gallows, wherefrom so many thousands had gone to read aright the riddle of the ages. Ben paled at the sight of this fearful implement of death, and his little white hand clutched the chaplain's arm timorously.

"Courage, my lad," said the good priest, "courage—it will soon be over now and you in a better world."

"But I like this world very well, thank you," rejoined Ben, and of that retort the worthy parson could not approve at all.

"Think of your sins," he went on dramatically. "Bear up—be a man."

"Oh," says Ben, "I can't be a man if I'm a girl, can I?"

"My lad!—my lad!—this is no hour to jest."

"But it's true," persisted the alleged Ben—and this happened at the very moment the cart drew up under the gallows—"I'm not Ben Calderon—I'm Kitty Mervin, who's going to be his wife——"

Off went Harlequin's cap—down came the pretty hair—up flew the parson's hands.

"Merciful heaven!" he cried. "But we can't hang you."

"Thank you for that," says Kitty, and very nimbly she leaped over the side of the cart and disappeared into the crowd amid a roaring of voices, cheers, laughter, hoots such as Tyburn never had heard in all its long and wicked history.

The brave little girl! Of course, a good many had connived at the business, supported, as we know, by the most reverend the Bishop and his lordship the Earl. And Will Roker, the jailer, admittedly played a big part in it.

Ben, you see, did tarry, after all, for he it was who stood at the window of the old house in Holborn when the cortege went by, he who flung the flowers into the cart, he who kissed his hand to Kitty.

They were far away from London that night, sleeping in an old inn by Royston Common, report says. Influence stilled a hue and cry, and Ben got away to France ultimately, with the pretty baggage for his luggage.

Yet I doubt if he tarried there—for this was a man of good adventure, as we have seen.

MARC CONNELLY

Coroner's Inquest

CORONER'S INQUEST

"WHAT is your name?"

"Frank Wineguard."

"Where do you live?"

"A hundred and eighty-five West Fifty-fifth Street."

"What is your business?"

"I'm stage manager for *Hello, America*."

"You were the employer of James Dawle?"

"In a way. We both worked for Mr. Bender, the producer, but I have charge backstage."

"Did you know Theodore Robel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he in your company, too?"

"No, sir. I met him when we started rehearsals. That was about three months ago, in June. We sent out a call for midgets and he and Jimmy showed up together, with a lot of others. Robel was too big for us. I didn't see him again until we broke into their room Tuesday."

"You discovered their bodies?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Pike, there, was with me."

"You found them both dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you happen to be over in Jersey City?"

"Well, I called up his house at curtain time Monday night when I found Jimmy hadn't shown up for the performance. Mrs. Pike told me they were both out, and I asked her to have either Jimmy or Robel call me when they came in. Then Mrs. Pike called me Tuesday morning and said she tried to get into the room but she'd found the door was bolted. She said all her other roomers were out and she was alone and scared."

"I'd kind of suspected something might be wrong. So I said to wait and I'd come over. Then I took the tube over

and got there about noon. Then we went up and I broke down the door."

"Did you see this knife there?"

"Yes, sir. It was on the floor, about a foot from Jimmy."

"You say you suspected something was wrong. What do you mean by that?"

"I mean I felt something might have happened to Jimmy. Nothing like this, of course. But I knew he'd been feeling very depressed lately, and I knew Robel wasn't helping to cheer him up any."

"You mean that they had had quarrels?"

"No, sir. They just both had the blues. Robel had had them for a long time. Robel was Jimmy's brother-in-law. He'd married Jimmy's sister—she was a midget, too—about five years ago, but she died a year or so later. Jimmy had been living with them and after the sister died he and Robel took a room in Mrs. Pike's house together."

"How did you learn this?"

"Jimmy and I were pretty friendly at the theatre. He was a nice little fellow and seemed grateful that I'd given him his job. We'd only needed one midget for an Oriental scene in the second act and the agencies had sent about fifteen. Mr. Gehring, the director, told me to pick one of them as he was busy and I picked Jimmy because he was the littlest."

"After I got to know him he told me how glad he was I'd given him the job. He hadn't worked for nearly a year. He wasn't little enough to be a featured midget with circuses or in museums, so he had to take whatever came along. Anyway, we got to be friendly and he used to tell me about his brother-in-law and all."

"He never suggested that there might be ill-feeling between him and his brother-in-law?"

"No, sir. I don't imagine he'd ever had any words at all with Robel. As a matter of fact, from what I could gather I guess Jimmy had quite a lot of affection for him and he certainly did everything he could to help him. Robel was a lot worse off than Jimmy. Robel hadn't worked for a couple of years and Jimmy practically supported him. He used to tell me how Robel had been sunk ever since he got his late growth."

"His what?"

"His late growth. I heard it happens among midgets

often, but Jimmy told me about it first. Usually a midget will stay as long as he lives at whatever height he reaches when he's fourteen or fifteen, but every now and then one of them starts growing again just before he's thirty, and he can grow a foot or even more in a couple of years. Then he stops growing for good. But of course he don't look so much like a midget any more.

"That's what had happened to Robel about three years ago. Of course he had trouble getting jobs and it hit him pretty hard.

"From what Jimmy told me and from what Mrs. Pike says, I guess he used to talk about it all the time. Robel used to come over and see his agent in New York twice a week, but there was never anything for him. Then he'd go back to Jersey City. Most of the week he lived alone because after the show started Jimmy often stayed in New York with a cousin or somebody that lived uptown.

"Lately Robel hadn't been coming over to New York at all. But every Saturday night Jimmy would go over to Jersey City and stay till Monday with him, trying to cheer him up. Every Sunday they'd take a walk and go to a movie. I guess as they walked along the street Robel realised most the difference in their heights. And I guess that's really why they're both dead now."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, as I told you, Jimmy would try to sympathise with Robel and cheer him up. He and Robel both realised that Jimmy was working and supporting them and that Jimmy would probably keep right on working, according to the ordinary breaks of the game, while Robel would always be too big. It simply preyed on Robel's mind.

"And then three weeks ago Monday Jimmy thought he saw the axe fall.

"I was standing outside the stage door—it was about seven-thirty—and Jimmy came down the alley. He looked down in the mouth, which I thought was strange, seeing that he usually used to come in swinging his little cane and looking pretty cheerful. I said, 'How are you feeling, Jimmy?' and he said, 'I don't feel so good, Mr. Wineguard.' So I said, 'Why, what's the matter, Jimmy?' I could see there really was something the matter with him by this time.

"'I'm getting scared,' he said, and I says, 'Why?'

"‘I’m starting to grow again,’ he says. He said it the way you just found out you had some disease that was going to kill you in a week. He looked like he was shivering.

"‘Why, you’re crazy, Jimmy,’ I says. ‘You ain’t growing.’

"‘Yes, I am,’ he says. ‘I’m thirty-one and it’s that fate growth like my brother-in-law has. My father had it, but his people had money, so it didn’t make much difference to him. It’s different with me. I’ve got to keep working.’

"He went on like that for a while and then I tried to kid him out of it.

"‘You look all right to me,’ I said. ‘How tall have you been all along?’

"‘Thirty-seven inches,’ he says. So I says, ‘Come on into the prop-room and I’ll measure you.’

"He backed away from me. ‘No,’ he says, ‘I don’t want to know how much it is.’ Then he went up to the dressing-room before I could argue with him.

"All week he looked awful sunk. When he showed up the next Monday evening he looked almost white.

"I grabbed him as he was starting upstairs to make up.

"‘Come on out of it,’ I says. I thought he’d make a break and try to get away from me, but he didn’t. He just sort of smiled as if I didn’t understand. Finally, he says, ‘It ain’t any use, Mr. Wineguard.’

"‘Listen,’ I says, ‘you’ve been over with that brother-in-law of yours, haven’t you?’ He said yes, he had. ‘Well,’ I says, ‘that’s what’s bothering you. From what you tell me about him he’s talked about his own tough luck so much that he’s given you the willies, too. Stay away from him the end of this week.’

"He stood there for a second without saying anything. Then he says, ‘That wouldn’t do any good. He’s all alone over there and he needs company. Anyway, it’s all up with me, I guess. I’ve grown nearly two inches already.’

"I looked at him. He was pretty pathetic, but outside of that there wasn’t any change in him as far as I could see.

"I says, ‘Have you been measured?’ He said he hadn’t. Then I said, ‘Then how do you know? Your clothes fit you all right, except your pants, and as a matter of fact they seem a little longer.’

"‘I fixed my suspenders and let them down a lot farther,’ he says. ‘Besides they were always a little big for me.’

" 'Let's make sure,' I says. 'I'll get a yardstick and we'll make absolutely sure.' "

" But I guess he was too scared to face things. He wouldn't do it. "

" He managed to dodge me all week. Then, last Saturday night, I ran into him as I was leaving the theatre. I asked him if he felt any better. "

" 'I feel all right,' he says. He really looked scared to death. "

" That's the last time I saw him before I went over to Jersey City after Mrs. Pike phoned me Tuesday morning. "

" Patrolman Gorlitz has testified that the bodies were in opposite ends of the room when he arrived. They were in that position when you forced open the door ? "

" Yes, sir. "

" The medical examiner has testified that they were both dead of knife wounds, apparently from the same knife. Would you assume the knife had fallen from Dawle's hand as he fell ? "

" Yes, sir. "

" Has it been your purpose to suggest that both men were driven to despondency by a fear of lack of employment for Dawle, and that they might have committed suicide ? "

" No, sir. I don't think anything of the kind. "

" What do you mean ? "

" Well, when Mrs. Pike and I went in the room and I got a look at the knife, I said to Mrs. Pike that that was a funny kind of a knife for them to have in the room. You can see it's a kind of a butcher knife. Then Mrs. Pike told me it was one that she'd missed from her kitchen a few weeks before. She'd never thought either Robel or Jimmy had taken it. It struck me as funny Robel or Jimmy had stolen it, too. Then I put two and two together and found out what really happened. Have you got the little broken cane that was lying on the bed ? "

" Is this it ? "

" Yes, sir. Well, I'd never been convinced by Jimmy that he was really growing. So when Mrs. Pike told me about the knife I started figuring. I figured that about five minutes before that knife came into play Jimmy must have found it, probably by accident. "

" Why by accident ? "

" Because Robel had gone a little crazy, I guess. He'd

stolen it and kept it hidden from Jimmy. And when Jimmy found it he wondered what Robel had been doing with it. Then Robel wouldn't tell him and Jimmy found out for himself. Or maybe Robel did tell him. Anyway, Jimmy looked at the cane. It was the one he always carried. He saw where, when Jimmy wasn't looking, Robel had been cutting little pieces off the end of it."

HJALMAR BERGMAN

Judith

JUDITH

THE old man sat on a stool by the gateway. To each one who approached he called out :
"Leave my house in peace."

The house was a cottage, consisting of three rooms, a kitchen and two attics. The trees in the garden were bare, the grass frostbitten, so that it could not even be used for grazing. Truly it was not much to watch over, but the old man did not leave his post. He sat there still though it was dusk, and to each one who went by he called out :

"Leave my house in peace."

If any of the enemy soldiers stopped by his gate, he got up, took off his greasy, green cap, and said that death was in the house.

"I speak in your own interest, I have death in the house. If you do not believe me, follow, I will show you. But it is catching, sir, very catching."

The soldier would believe his words, for he himself looked like death.

This house, which harboured death, was the last in the village. When night had fallen a young soldier came and asked for lodging. He had knocked at many doors and found all the beds already occupied. It was impossible for him to find his way to the next house, or village, in the darkness. As for death he feared it as little as a soldier allows himself fear. The old man repeated what he had said to other passers-by, but this one was very young and somewhat overbold. He laughed and said :

"I have heard that tale before. Look here, let me in. I will neither steal nor kill. I only want to sleep."

When the old man told him of death in the house, he was not to be frightened away. He pushed the old man aside, and stepped into the garden. It was so dark that he could not see the door of the house, but went up to a lighted

window. The old man followed him. When they stood together at the window, he said :

"Look, I do not lie. It is my son-in-law in there. He is dead."

There was a bed in the middle of the room, with the head towards the window. On it lay a dead man. He was as young as the soldier, but dead. He was covered by a sheet up to the neck. By the head of the bed sat a young woman, almost a girl. She sat in front of a table on which were placed four lighted candles. The soldier looked more at the girl than at the dead man. He found her beautiful, but rather too dark, and not as pretty as his own sweetheart at home. But after all it was something which did not concern him. He only wanted to sleep. He turned to the old man and said :

"Surely there is a bed in the house, or at least a mattress, or something to lie on ?"

"There is," answered the old man. "In the attic there is a bed made up, which my son-in-law used to use before he was married. But, sir, I speak in your own interest, you can see with your own eyes that there is death in the house. It is catching. I beg you to leave my house in peace. I am an old man and have sorrows enough."

The soldier said : "Old fellow, I don't intend to deny myself that bed in the attic. My lying there won't hurt anybody, and it will feel splendid to creep down between sheets again."

He turned a deaf ear to the old man's objections and found his way to the door. The porch was quite dark ; he was forced to open the door of the room, where the four candles were burning. Having once opened the door it would have been impolite not to step in and state his errand. He stood at attention just inside the door. The young woman got up slowly and bowed her head.

The soldier said : "Pardon, madame, I merely seek shelter for the night. Would you or someone else show me to the room where your intended used to sleep ?"

"The bed is ready. I will fetch water and candles. It is cold ; would you like a fire ? We always used to have a fire at this time of the year when my betrothed slept up there. He was now my husband. We were married this summer."

The soldier took off his helmet and went up to the bed

on tip-toe. He felt he must say something, and asked: "What was his illness?"

"Oh," she said, looking him in the eyes for the first time, "my husband died in the war. He was killed the day before yesterday. From what they told me it happened in a bayonet charge. He had his throat cut."

"Your father . . ." he began. She interrupted: .

"Yes, I know. He says we have a catching illness in the house. You did not let yourself be frightened off by that yarn. It is a usual one. Father fears that I should behave badly if I met any of you. But I am not so foolish. Who murdered him? Neither this one nor that one. It was the war?"

"That's true," said the soldier. "It's no use being angry with individuals. It's the war, that's all."

He came a few steps nearer and looked at the dead man. The wife bent forward and showed how the bayonet had cut, right across the throat. The soldier shook his head:

"Yes. It is not pleasant to see them like this. While it is going on it seems all right. But to see them afterwards, and like this at home—it's hard. Yes, your chaps are damn fine fighters. I was in that charge, too."

"I know," said the woman. "Father thought that our reinforcements had come up and that you would go another way, but I knew you would come here. I heard your signals at mid-day. Father wanted us to hide. But what's the use of that?"

"True," cried the soldier, flushed with eagerness and joy. "We don't hurt anyone; just let us alone and—but it's really nice of you not to be afraid. . . ."

He stopped short, ashamed of his eagerness. He felt so terribly strange here in the enemy country, but it was a feeling that could not be confessed to just anyone. Fortunately, she seemed to be preoccupied with her thoughts. She was bending over the dead man, stroking his hair and forehead in the same gentle, soothing way his sweetheart used to do at home. Then she said:

"We can't go on standing here. I suppose you are hungry?"

She took him into the dining-room, lit the lamp and laid the cloth. She took his helmet and cloak and hung them in the passage. She did not touch the rifle. He did not want

to have it out of reach, so when she went into the kitchen he took the opportunity to lay it under the table and kept his foot on the butt. She placed quite a banquet before him. The soldier took up his purse and counted the coins. There were not many.

"Thank you, thank you," he murmured, embarrassed. "Madame is taking altogether too much trouble. . . ."

When she brought two bottles of wine he had to refuse.

"No, really this won't do. I don't want anything so luxurious, and at the moment I am not in funds. . . ."

She smiled a little.

"I say, put that away. It is treachery to one's country to sell food to the enemy. But to feed the hungry can't be wrong, even in war-time."

She poured out a glass of wine.

"Drink. Drink to whoever you choose. Perhaps you have a sweetheart at home? Yes, I can see you have. Eat now and drink. Meanwhile, I will prepare your room."

The soldier ate and drank. He thought: I will eat just sufficient to be satisfied, no more. She is really very decent to me, and it would be taking advantage of her goodness to eat up the lot, though I could easily manage it. If she or the old man would keep me company it would be another matter. But I can't expect that.

After a while she came back. "Why aren't you eating? Don't despise the little the house can offer. Perhaps you think I've poisoned the wine? See here." She poured out a glass, drank half of it, and then handed it to him. He laughed and drank it.

"Oh, I'm not frightened. You are very good. But why won't your father keep me company?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Father has such old-fashioned ideas. He would not break bread with the enemy. But it doesn't do to be so narrow these days. When one's own people are gone one has to put up with the company that comes. Don't you think so? I'm quite hungry. Just think, I haven't eaten since I last sat at table with my husband. And that's four days ago."

She took a chair and sat down opposite him. He cut the meat and handed her a helping, they drank to each other. They began to speak of this and that, the weather, the bad

roads, the destroyed crops. They avoided the war, but he told jolly stories of his home. First he talked of his father and mother and his childhood. He would have liked best to speak of his sweetheart, but did not dare.

She listened attentively, smiling a little when he laughed. Suddenly she asked, "And your sweetheart? You don't say anything about her?" He flushed. There wasn't anything to talk about, just vague plans for the future. She agreed with him.

"Perhaps you will never see her again."

He sighed and thought: Why does she torment me with that? I would like her to sit here beside me, and let me hold her hand in mine. I feel so lonely.

Just then she got up, went to the door and listened. He twisted uneasily on his chair, bent down, and carefully moved the rifle nearer. The woman came back to the table, moved her chair closer to his, telling him that she felt so horribly lonely. "Just think. I've been married only four months, and now I am a widow. You can understand how empty it is, as though the world had come to an end. I haven't anything to think about now, nothing to hope for, nothing to fear. It is dreadful not to have anyone to be fond of . . ."

"You were very fond of him?" he asked.

She did not answer. Her head sank. The pretty curve of her bent neck moved him. He thought: Poor little thing, she is so pretty and so lonely, just like I am. What shall I do now? I don't want to get fond of her, I don't want to, I don't . . . Perhaps I've been drinking too much. Her husband is living in there. Ugh! Oh, she could never have been in love with him, or why is she sitting here like this? I'd better go up to bed.

"What is your name?" he asked.

She looked up, staring at him with a surprised expression.

"What is my name? You mean my first name? I am called Judith."

"Judith," he repeated, smiling sleepily. "That sounds Biblical; but it's a nice name."

She nodded; then suddenly she said: "What a nice neck you have."

He gave an embarrassed laugh, and made excuses. Without thinking, he had unbuttoned a few buttons of his uniform. Camp manners. He buttoned up. But she did not want him

to. Oh, no! He was to feel quite at home. At least for one night he should have a home. As she undid the buttons again she touched his bare neck. He caught her arm and drew her closer. She resisted gently, their feet touched the rifle, and the bayonet hit against the table-leg with a clang of steel. They started.

He laughed. "There you are," he said. "We are sitting here at the table nearly like man and wife, at home. But the bayonet is under the table. *C'est la guerre.*"

She got up quickly and went into the kitchen. Now I have annoyed her, he thought. What a stupid, clumsy fool you are. Thought she would throw herself into your arms at once. Oh, no, she is a decent woman. And you didn't want to do anything to her, you have had too much, that's what's the matter. Now go to bed without saying good-night, she doesn't want to see you.

He got ready and picked up the rifle. As he stood up she came back. She had fetched dessert and a bottle of sherry. He had to make the best of it. They ate and drank. He was on his guard, and behaved as correctly as could be, spoke of indifferent things, and took care to keep his eyes and his thoughts away from the woman. For the last time he drank to her.

"Are you going to bed, too?" he asked.

"No, I am going in to my husband," she answered.

He suspected a rebuke in those words, it annoyed him. He had an overwhelming desire to say something sharp to her. Why are you sitting here, if you really loved your husband? But he controlled himself, and merely said as he raised his glass: "I pity you, my beautiful enemy. But . . . *c'est la guerre.*"

He bowed good-night, and took up his rifle. The old man lit him up the stairs. He locked the door, putting on the hook, and began to undress.

The room was quite small and low. The bed stood in the middle of the floor, nicely bedded with sheets. Oh, that was going to feel fine. On the bedside table four candles were lighted. What extravagance. He put out two of them, and then kicked off his boots. Suddenly he crept over to the door in his stockinged feet, and listened. The stairs creaked. He opened the door and whispered softly into the darkness: "Judith . . . Judith . . ."

Silence. He closed the door slowly, but did not latch it. He got into bed and put out the lights. He said to himself: I'm only going to think about the folks at home. . . .

In a few seconds he was asleep. . . .

He woke. The room was brightly lit, he saw the four flaming candles. Judith was bending over him. His heart began to thump, thump, thump. Oh, it almost hurt. He stretched out his arms and touched her head with shaking hands.

"Judith . . . Judith . . ."

"For you my name is Judith. To him, who lies down there, I had another name. Who will call me by name now?"

"Judith . . . Judith . . ."

He drew her head towards him.

Then he felt that she was cutting his throat.

"Judith!" he screamed.

She only answered: "I pity you, my beautiful enemy. . . ."

The death rattle sounded in his throat. She left him alone. The whole house was in darkness except these two rooms, where four candles burned. The whole village was dark and silent. Strangers were sleeping there among enemies.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

The Taipan

THE TAIWAN

NO one knew better than he that he was an important person. He was number one in not the least important branch of the most important English firm in China. He had worked his way up through solid ability and he looked back with a faint smile at the callow clerk who had come out to China thirty years before. When he remembered the modest home he had come from, a little red house in a long row of little red houses, in Barnes, a suburb which, aiming desperately at the genteel, achieves only a sordid melancholy, and compared it with the magnificent stone mansion, with its wide verandas and spacious rooms, which was at once the office of the company and his own residence, he chuckled with satisfaction.

He had come a long way since then. He thought of the high tea to which he sat down when he came home from school (he was at St. Paul's), with his father and mother and his two sisters, a slice of cold meat, a great deal of bread and butter, and plenty of milk in his tea, everybody helping himself, and then he thought of the state in which now he ate his evening meal.

He always dressed, and whether he was alone or not he expected the three boys to wait at table. His number one boy knew exactly what he liked and he never had to bother himself with the details of house-keeping; but he always had a set dinner with soup and fish, entrée, roast, sweet and savoury, so that if he wanted to ask anyone in at the last moment he could. He liked his food and he did not see why, when he was alone, he should have less good a dinner than when he had had a guest.

He had indeed gone far. That was why he did not care to go home now—he had not been to England for ten years—and he took his leave in Japan or Vancouver, where he was sure of meeting old friends from the China coast. He knew

no one at home. His sisters had married in their own station, their husbands were clerks and their sons were clerks; there was nothing between him and them; they bored him. He satisfied the claims of relationship by sending them every Christmas a piece of fine silk, some elaborate embroidery, or a case of tea.

He was not a mean man, and as long as his mother lived he had made her an allowance. But when the time came for him to retire he had no intention of going back to England; he had seen too many men do that and he knew how often it was a failure; he meant to take a house near the racecourse in Shanghai: what with bridge and his ponies and golf he expected to get through the rest of his life very comfortably. But he had a good many years before he need think of retiring. In another five or six Higgins would be going home, and then he would take charge of the head office in Shanghai. Meanwhile, he was very happy where he was; he could save money, which you couldn't do in Shanghai, and have a good time into the bargain.

This place had another advantage over Shanghai; he was the most prominent man in the community and what he said went. Even the consul took care to keep on the right side of him. Once a consul and he had been at loggerheads and it was not he who had gone to the wall. The taipan thrust out his jaw pugnaciously as he thought of the incident.

But he smiled, for he felt in an excellent humour. He was walking back to his office from a capital luncheon at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. They did you very well there. The food was first rate and there was plenty of liquor. He had started with a couple of cocktails, then he had some excellent sauterne, and he finished up with two glasses of port and some fine old brandy. He felt good. And when he left he did a thing that was rare with him: he walked. His bearers with his chair kept a few paces behind him in case he felt inclined to slip into it, but he enjoyed stretching his legs. He did not get enough exercise these days. Now that he was too heavy to ride it was difficult to get exercise. But if he was too heavy to ride he could still keep ponies, and as he strolled along in the balmy air he thought of the spring meeting. He had a couple of griffins that he had hopes of and one of the lads in his office had

turned out a fine jockey (he must see they didn't sneak him away—old Higgins in Shanghai would give a pot of money to get him over there) and he ought to pull off two or three races. He flattered himself that he had the finest stable in the city. He pouted his broad chest like a pigeon. It was a beautiful day, and good to be alive.

He paused as he came to the cemetery. It stood there, neat and orderly, as an evident sign of the community's opulence. He never passed the cemetery without a little glow of pride. He was pleased to be an Englishman. For the cemetery stood in a place, valueless when it was chosen, which with the increase of the city's affluence was now worth a great deal of money.

It had been suggested that the graves should be moved to another spot and the land sold for building, but the feeling of the community was against it. It gave the taipan a sense of satisfaction to think that their dead rested on the most valuable site on the island. It showed that there were things they cared for more than money. Money be blown! When it came to "the things that mattered" (this was a favourite phrase with the taipan), well, one remembered that money wasn't everything.

And now he thought he would take a stroll through. He looked at the graves. They were neatly kept and the pathways were free from weeds. There was a look of prosperity. And as he sauntered along he read the names on the tombstones. Here were three side by side; the captain, the first mate, and the second mate of the barque Mary Baxter who had all perished together in the typhoon of 1908. He remembered it well. There was a little group of two missionaries, their wives and children, who had been massacred during the Boxer troubles. Shocking thing that had been. Not that he took much stock in missionaries; but, hang it all, one couldn't have these damned Chinese massacring them.

Then he came to a cross with a name on it he knew. Good chap, Edward Mulock, but he couldn't stand his liquor, drank himself to death, poor devil; at twenty-five the taipan had known a lot of them do that; there were several more neat crosses with a man's name on them and the age, twenty-five, twenty-six, or twenty-seven; it was always the same story; they had come out to China; they had never seen so much money before, they were good fellows and they

wanted to drink with the rest; they couldn't stand it, and there they were in the cemetery. You had to have a strong head and a fine constitution to drink, drink for drink, on the China coast. Of course it was very sad, but the taipan could hardly help a smile when he thought how many of these young fellows he had drunk underground. And there was a death that had been useful, a fellow in his own firm, senior to him and a clever chap, too; if that fellow had lived he might not have been taipan now. Truly the ways of fate were inscrutable.

Ah, and here was little Mrs. Turner. Violet Turner. She had been a pretty little thing. He had had quite an affair with her; he had been devilish cut up when she died. He looked at her age on the tombstone. She'd be no chicken if she were alive now. And as he thought of all those dead people a sense of satisfaction spread through him. He had beaten them all. They were dead and he was alive, and by George, he'd scored them off. His eyes collected in one picture all those crowded graves and he smiled scornfully. He very nearly rubbed his hands.

"No one ever thought I was a fool," he muttered.

He had a feeling of good natured contempt for the gibbering dead. Then, as he strolled along, he came suddenly upon two coolies digging a grave. He was astonished, for he had not heard that anyone in the community was dead.

"Who the devil's that for?" he said aloud.

The coolies did not even look at him, they went on with their work, standing in the grave, deep down, and they shovelled up heavy clods of earth. Though he had been so long in China he knew no Chinese, in his day it was not thought necessary to learn the damned language, and he asked the coolies in English whose grave they were digging. They did not understand. They answered him in Chinese and he cursed them for ignorant fools. He knew that Mrs. Broome's child was ailing and it might have died, but he would certainly have heard of it, and, besides, that wasn't a child's grave, it was a man's, and a big man's too. It was uncanny. He wished he hadn't gone into that cemetery; he hurried out and stepped into his chair. His good humour had all gone and there was an uneasy frown on his face. The moment he got back to his office he called to his number two:

"I say, Peters, who's dead, d'you know?"

But Peters knew nothing. The taipan was puzzled. He called one of the native clerks and sent him to the cemetery to ask the coolies. He began to sign his letters. The clerk came back and said the coolies had gone and there was no one to ask. The taipan began to feel vaguely annoyed: he did not like things to happen of which he knew nothing. His own boy would know; his boy always knew everything, and he sent for him; but the boy had heard of no death in the community.

"I knew no one was dead," said the taipan irritably. "But what's the grave for?"

He told the boy to go to the overseer of the cemetery and find out what the devil he had dug a grave for when no one was dead.

"Let me have a whisky and soda before you go," he added, as the boy was leaving the room.

He did not know why the sight of the grave had made him uncomfortable. But he tried to put it out of his mind. He felt better when he had drunk the whisky, and he finished his work. He went upstairs and turned over the pages of "Punch." In a few minutes he would go to the club and play a rubber or two of Bridge before dinner. But it would ease his mind to hear what his boy had to say, and he waited for his return. In a little while the boy came back and he brought the overseer with him.

"What are you having a grave dug for?" he asked the overseer point blank. "Nobody's dead."

"I no dig grave," said the man.

"What the devil do you mean by that? There were two coolies digging a grave this afternoon."

The two Chinese looked at one another. Then the boy said they had been to the cemetery together. There was no new grave there.

The taipan only just stopped himself from speaking.

"But damn it all, I saw it myself," were the words on the tip of his tongue.

But he did not say them. He grew very red as he choked them down. The two Chinese looked at him with their steady eyes. For a moment his breath failed him.

"All right. Get out," he gasped.

But as soon as they were gone he shouted for the boy

again, and when he came, maddeningly impassive, he told him to bring some whisky. He rubbed his sweating face with a handkerchief. His hand trembled when he lifted the glass to his lips. They could say what they liked, but he had seen the grave. Why, he could still hear the dull thud as the coolies threw the spadefuls of earth on the ground above them. What did it mean? He could feel his heart beating. He felt strangely ill at ease. But he pulled himself together. It was all nonsense. If there was no grave there it must have been an hallucination. The best thing he could do was to go to the club, and if he ran across the doctor he would ask him to give him a look over.

Everyone in the club looked just the same as ever. He did not know why he should have expected them to look different. It was a comfort. These men, living for many years with one another lives that were methodically regulated, had acquired a number of little idiosyncrasies—one of them hummed incessantly while he played Bridge, another insisted on drinking beer through a straw—and these tricks which so often irritated the taipan now gave him a sense of security. He needed it, for he could not get out of his head that strange sight he had seen; he played Bridge very badly; his partner was censorious, and the taipan lost his temper. He thought the men were looking at him oddly. He wondered what they saw in him that was unaccustomed.

Suddenly he felt he could not bear to stay in the club any longer. As he went out he saw the doctor reading "The Times" in the reading-room, but he could not bring himself to speak to him. He wanted to see for himself whether that grave was really there, and, stepping into his chair, he told his bearers to take him to the cemetery. You couldn't have an hallucination twice, could you? And besides, he would take the overseer in with him, and if the grave was not there he wouldn't see it, and if it was he'd give the overseer the soundest thrashing he'd ever had. But the overseer was nowhere to be found. He had gone out and taken the keys with him. When the taipan found he could not get into the cemetery he felt suddenly exhausted. He got back into his chair and told his bearers to take him home. He would lie down for half an hour before dinner. He was tired out. That was it. He had heard that people had hallucinations when they were tired.

When his boy came in to put out his clothes for dinner it was only by an effort of will that he got up. He had a strong inclination not to dress that evening, but he resisted it; he made it a rule to dress, he had dressed every evening for twenty years, and it would never do to break his rule. But he ordered a bottle of champagne with his dinner, and that made him feel more comfortable. Afterwards he told the boy to bring him the best brandy. When he had drunk a couple of glasses of this he felt himself again. Hallucinations be damned! He went to the billiard-room and practised a few difficult shots. There could not be much the matter with him when his eye was so sure. When he went to bed he sank immediately into a sound sleep.

But suddenly he awoke. He had dreamed of that open grave and the coolies digging leisurely. He was sure he had seen them. It was absurd to say it was an hallucination when he had seen them with his own eyes. Then he heard the rattle of the night watchman going his rounds. It broke upon the stillness of the night so harshly that it made him jump out of his skin. And then terror seized him. He felt a horror of the winding multitudinous streets of the Chinese city, and there was something ghastly and terrible in the convoluted roofs of the temples with their devils grimacing and tortured. He loathed the smells that assaulted his nostrils. And the people. Those myriads of blue-clad coolies, and the beggars in their filthy rags, and the merchants and the magistrates, sleek, smiling, and inscrutable, in their long black gowns. They seemed to press upon him with menace. He hated the country. China. Why had he ever come? He was panic-stricken now. He must get out. He would not stay another year, another month. What did he care about Shanghai?

"Oh, my God!" he cried, "if I were only safely back in England."

He wanted to go home. If he had to die he wanted to die in England. He could not bear to be buried among all these yellow men, with their slanting eyes and their grinning faces. He wanted to be buried at home, not in that grave he had seen that day. He could never rest there. Never. What did it matter what people thought? Let them think what they liked. The only thing that mattered was to get away while he had the chance.

He got out of bed and wrote to the head of the firm, and said he had discovered he was dangerously ill. He must be replaced. He could not stay longer than was absolutely necessary. He must go home at once.

They found the letter in the morning clenched in the taipan's hand. He had slipped down between the desk and the chair. He was stone dead.

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